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**Anxiety and asceticism****Michael Ignatieff**

MICHEL FOUCAULT

Histoire de la Sexualité

Tome 2, L'Usage de Plaisirs

285pp, 207 0700599

Tome 3, Le Souci de soi

284pp, 207 0273832

Paris: Gallimard, 85fr each.

These volumes appeared in the bookshops of Paris as their author lay dying in the clinic for nervous diseases at Salpêtrière hospital. It is said he was still able to read the first reviews: the Paris dailies devoted pages to him. One can imagine his macabre amusement at reading his own obituary notices and at the tide of celebrity enveloping him in death.

Foucault's celebrity is something of a puzzle. He himself did not court it. He was scathing about the imprisoning and self-deluding role of prophet accorded French intellectuals by their public. While he sometimes succumbed to the temptations of that role - notably in his ill-considered welcome for Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic despotism - he sought in his long silent hours at the Bibliothèque Nationale to slip away from his public persona as a master of intellectual fireworks.

Having devoted his intellectual career to studying how systems of ideas become systems of power, Foucault had the consistency and self-awareness to avoid making a system of power out of his own ideas. He had many interlocutors - they all testify to his intellectual generosity, scrupulous self-doubt and terrifying sense of humour - but he left behind no disciples. At his death, there were no Foucaultians as there are Lacanians and once were Althusserians. Although he held a prestigious chair at the Collège de France, he remained a solitary outsider in French intellectual life. He lent his prestige to many political groups - he headed out tracts himself beneath the walls of prisons, spoke in critical support of feminist and gay causes, signed appeals and donated money to the cause of the boat people, the Afghan tribesmen and the victims of General Jaruzelski - but refused the embrace of any political label, including the liberalism currently fashionable in French intellectual circles.

Foucault's celebrity was paradoxical. If French opinion polls of the 1980s consistently rated him the most important living French intellectual, it was not because he was associated with any doctrine or idea bearing his name, but perhaps because he assumed the prophetic mantle of the French man of letters inherited from Sartre and Aron while retaining an ironic distance from its pretensions. His intellectual influence is as paradoxical as his fame. He left behind no consistent methodological approach, no body of philosophical analysis, no theory which could properly be

called his own. Those who, in the wake of his death, called him the most important philosopher since Heidegger were surrendering their judgment to the exigencies of funeral piety. Yet scarcely any philosopher working on the history of philosophy or historian working on the history of institutions, social science or sexuality can avoid confronting the challenge of Foucault's books.

Looking back on his work now, one begins to realize how much of its power and influence depended on negation. Against the philosophers he insisted, with Nietzsche as his inspiration, on the radical relativity of philosophical truth. In place of a philosophy of reason, he wanted to write a history of truth, a genealogy of the scientific discourses of the modern age which produce their own account of what is true about sex, society and the self. Against the historians, he insisted on the radical discontinuities in the languages in which past and present speak to one another. In the idea of an "epistemic break", he sought to highlight the geological fault-lines beneath the traditions of ideas which historians had taken as unbroken terrain.

His historical work lacked a theory of historical change: why such breaks in the languages of reason, madness, self-consciousness and social explanation could occur, notably between 1750 and 1850, he never succeeded in explaining. But he succeeded, often brilliantly, in showing how radical these changes were, and simply by insisting on the radicality of change showed up the inadequacy of the systems of explanation on offer, notably those which link changes in discursive practice to changes in the economic and social base of a society.

This consistent programme of scepticism towards the universalizing pretensions of philosophers and the blinkered empiricism of historians coaxed him to neither camp. Many English-speaking philosophers found his theory of discourse confused and undistinguished, while many historians found his history too philosophical, too much given to generalization based on selective and spectacular facts.

Yet by linking the history of ideas to the history of institutions, the history of reason to its dark enactment in prisons, hospitals, asylums and confessionals, Foucault in effect created a new social history of modern rationality as well as a new philosophy of the relation between knowledge and power.

The volumes he leaves behind are bound to puzzle anyone seeking to grasp the unity and continuity of his work. Their plain and austere scholarly style will confound the expectations of those who were drawn to his work by the *brilo* of his prose, by those set-pieces which began the earlier books - the harrowing description of Damien's death at the beginning of *Discipline and Punish*, the analysis of the mirror-play of representations in Velázquez's

'Las Meninas' at the beginning of *Words and Things*, and the evocation of the medieval Ship of Fools in *Madness and Civilization*.

In chronological and thematic focus too, the new volumes will surprise readers expecting Foucault to continue his genealogy of modern reason. Indeed, in the interval between the publication of the first volume of *Histoire de la sexualité* in 1976 and the appearance of these two further volumes eight years later, the axis of his work shifted so radically that the continuity of the whole project must be put in doubt. All of his earlier work could be read as a genealogy of the disciplinarian and authoritarian bias of modern rationality. The chronological focus was on the hinge upon which modernity turns: 1775-1850. As Foucault once said, his subject was the history of our own subjection, that is, how we have made our bodies, our behaviour, our reason and our conscience the subject of our own science, our own discipline and our own self-control. The *History of Sexuality*, in six projected volumes, was to have carried this history of subjection into the deepest recesses of our subjectivity. How, Foucault asked, have modern men and women come to regard their sexuality as the hidden secret of their being? Why is sexuality at the centre of their struggle for the control of themselves and others? Why do they believe that knowledge of their sexuality will give them true knowledge about themselves?

The first volume was guided by the assumption that these preoccupations were distinctively modern, the work of the same ordering and confining reason whose effects he had already examined in the prison, the asylum and the hospital. In devoting these two new volumes to the Greek and Latin discourses on sexual asceticism, Foucault jettisoned that equation between modernity and rationalized repression on which the coherence of his original project depended. Evidently it is not just the post-Enlightenment rationalism of modern times which is the bearer of that disciplinarian reflex towards the sexual from which we never seem able to escape, but Western reason itself since the dawn of Greek philosophy.

Sexual relations have always been problematic in the Western tradition, potentially dangerous to health, peace of mind and virtue. Nowhere in our heritage is there an equivalent to the Hindu or Oriental *ars amandi* which seeks the perfection of erotic and sexual pleasure as spiritual ends. In all of our available discourses, medical and moral, sex has been a hard knot of anxiety.

Foucault is careful not to exaggerate the continuity of Western sexual discourse. The meaning of our sexual anxieties has shifted markedly, first between the Greek and Roman eras and then more radically still with the coming of Christianity. The Greek and Latin texts which are the subject of these volumes may be at the origins of our own sexual culture, but they are

origina we can only gaze upon with the eyes of strangers. As Foucault puts it, his purpose in returning to the Greek and Latin literature was to "inquire into the difference which keeps us estranged from ways of thinking we can still recognize as the origin of our own".

In *L'Usage des plaisirs*, he returns us to a moral world in which the essential division between types of sexual practice was not between homosexual and heterosexual, but between temperate and intemperate indulgence in pleasure, Platonic love and base physical desire, and active and passive roles in sexual pleasure. Like any good anthropological account of a vanished tribe, this recreation of a vanished discourse has the effect of showing up the unseen lines of demarcation within our own. In Greek sexual ethics, it was not inconsistent for a man to be a husband, father and head of household and at the same time the lover and protector of a young boy. As Foucault shows, this ethical view assumed an idea of a self which could contain both homosexual and heterosexual dispositions.

In classical Greek ethics, moral anxiety focused on an issue which has little place in contemporary sexual ethics: could a young man of good family rightfully take pleasure in a passive sexual position? Why is sexuality compatible with the virile roles of future father, household head and citizen? As Foucault makes clear, if moralities are historically relative, it is because each is addressed to a determinate audience: in this case, the adult male citizens who made up the civic community of Greek life.

Women were understood to have a capacity for sexual pleasure, but they were not understood as sexual subjects, as mistresses of their own desire. The sexual act was defined in male terms as penetration and the active role was accorded only to the male. Foucault leaves unexplored the question of lesbianism in Greek sexual ethics, a curious omission given the importance of Sappho.

Between the Greek writers who figure in Volume Two - Plato, Aristotle, Hippocrates and Xenophon - and the Roman moralists of Volume Three - Artemidorus, Galen, Epictetus, Plutarch, Seneca and Soranus - the direction of moral questioning shifted from homosexual to heterosexual relations, from the compatibility of virility with passive pleasure, to the morality of conjugal relations between spouses. In Pliny's moving letters to his wife, in the moral treatises of Epicurus, Seneca and Lucian, Foucault traces the gradual emergence of an ideal of heterosexual love within marriage as the privileged and natural state of sexual relations. Monogamy displaced the Greek ideal of temperance in sexual matters. The link between sexual activity and procreation was drawn tighter: marriage was natural because it was the attachment which promoted the human telos of reproduction. Homosexual-

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ity did not fall under a ban in the new discourse, but the old Platonic language of disinterested male love lost its power to move and convince. Between Plato and Plutarch, the erotic ceased to be divided between the platonic and the physical. In Plutarch's "Dialogue of Love", the sexual was unified for the first time as a single domain with two forms, the homosexual and the heterosexual.

As is often the case with his work, Foucault is more successful at describing change than in explaining it. He denies that the increasing stress on marriage as the centre of sexual life in the third century AD represents the individualization and privatization of a language of public virtue in the face of the growing decadence of Roman public life. But since the social and political background of the period is hardly mentioned, the relation between the crisis of the empire and the transformation of moral language is left obscure. Instead, Foucault argues that changes in the language of sexual morality form part of a deeper change in the language of self-consciousness. Between Socrates and Epictetus, the maxim "the unexamined life is not worth living" shifted in meaning. For Socrates self-examination had meant reason's dialogue with self-deception. For Epictetus, self-examination implied a programme of bodily and mental asceticism designed to achieve self-mastery, the liberation of reason from the lure of fantasy. As the image of self-mastery was transformed, the sexual ideal shifted from temperance to the more austere ideal of *ataraxia*, rational indifference to desire itself.

In what sense, Foucault asks, is pagan stoicism at the root of modern asceticism in sexual

matters? Between us and the Greeks falls the shadow of Augustine and Aquinas. If we are heirs of the Greeks and Romans, it is through the Christian appropriation of the Stoic past. Foucault briefly recalls the controversy which has divided Western thought since the Renaissance over the relation between Christian and pagan thought. In this debate, he neither recovers Epictetus as a good Christian *avant la lettre* nor joins in the equally common nostalgia for the sunlit sexual tolerance of the pagan past. His contribution to the debate is to insist that Christian and classical discourses on sexual matters are so different in structure and mode of address that it makes no sense to compare their content in terms of the binary opposites of "repressive" or "tolerant".

Classical sexual discourse unified the aesthetic and the moral in treatises on the art of living addressed to male citizens. Christian discourse took the form of a moral code which separated the moral and the aesthetic and addressed itself to a universal moral subject which included women and slaves. Ancient treatises of virtue did not proscribe or enunciate the forbidden in sexual matters as the casuistical manuals of the Christian confessors were to do. In classical discourse, sexual activity was understood as a social practice, while in the language of the Church it was understood as a sign of man's fall, a mark of his sin, a stain which ascetic practice could never entirely wipe away. In both discourses, sexual activity was understood to be fraught with danger to health and morality, but only in Christianity was sexual excess threatened with eternal damnation, and only in Christian discourse did there emerge the idea that the sexual motive could surface in

every act of life, as the worm in the apple rotting the substance of a life from within. It is in the Christian sense of the omnipresence of the sexual motive that the Freudian idea of sexually sublimated drives has its germ. In classical discourse, sexual activity occupied a discrete and bounded place in moral concerns. It was understood to be limited by the will and by the social relations of the *oecumene* or household. In Christian language, sex for the first time became the secret truth of fallen man, the central sign of his fall and therefore the central preoccupation of his moral life.

In this contrast between moral discourse as law and art, as code or dialogue, as injunction, or meditation, Foucault not only offers us a new way to understand the difference between pagan and Christian asceticism. He also implies—and several of his final interviews simplified the suggestion—that modern sexual life needs to find its own discourse on the art of living to replace the medical and psychoanalytical languages which nowadays serve as guides to sexual choice. We need to find a way to ask ourselves what is fitting, honourable and beautiful in sexual matters, and our inherited languages of medicine and psychology can only tell us what is good, healthy and normal. Foucault's return to the Greeks and Romans seems to have been attempting to identify more precisely the absence at the heart of modern sexual culture: on the one hand there is still a vestigial Christian moral puritanism, sheared away from a theology of salvation which made it credible; on the other, a hedonism guided by "how-to" books, pop psychology and the commercial marketing of sexual fantasy. In the middle, there is a void which conscientious

individuals try to fill with their own private act of living. But the public language which would make each of these private acts comprehensible to each other is missing. Foucault is attempting to recover the possibility of a coercive discourse on the art of life in which the sexual would have a discrete place within a general account of what we owe each other.

It is here, just as these two books end, comparing classical and Christian languages of the self in order to show, by implication, the silence at the heart of modern moral language that the death of Foucault makes itself felt most keenly. The next volume—*L'Aveu du chaire*—needed a month's more work to be completed but it will appear in the autumn as Foucault left it. Because the *History of Sexuality* will remain unfinished, the history of modern asceticism we are offered is only a sketchy outline. It is a history which begins, now, with Pinel or with the secular reason of the Enlightenment, but with the pagan stoics and with Saint Paul, Tertullian, Saint Augustine. It begins, now, not with the confinement of the insane, the criminal and the sick in the seventeenth century, but with that sense of sin and that sense of desire which date back to the meeting between the pagan and Christian languages of the self.

It is a genealogy of the present which deals with his previous work and with the tradition which, since Weber, has sought to define the modern in terms of the particular distinctiveness of post-Reformation asceticism. It is a testament to a dying man's courage that his work should have thrown over the traces so merely of the work of others, but of twenty-five years of his own.

## Not for public consumption

J.A. Turner

JOHN F. NAYLOR  
Aims and Institution: Sir Maurice Hankey, the Cabinet Secretariat and the custody of Cabinet secrecy  
419pp. Cambridge University Press. £30.  
052125583 X

Here are three books in one. John Naylor begins with an account of the activities of the Cabinet Secretariat, founded in December 1916 to bring order out of the chaos of Cabinet government. As it develops, his theme becomes the work of Sir Maurice Hankey, Cabinet Secretary from 1916 to 1938. Interleaved with all this is the question of Cabinet secrecy and the custody of official papers; and at the end of the volume this becomes the dominant issue.

Can this fusion of themes be justified? The effect on the reader of frequent changes of focus is often vertiginous, but each separate point is important. Hankey occupies centre stage for most of the book. We already know a lot about him. His memoirs, published in the early 1960s after tribulations lovingly described by Naylor, have been supplemented by Stephen Roskill's three-decker biography, which reproduces or paraphrases large chunks of Hankey's diary and papers. Hankey, a Royal Marine officer, began his official life as secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence. In 1914 he was called in to take the minutes of an ad hoc committee of ministers called the War Council, which in due course became the Dardanelles Committee and the War Committee. In December 1916, when Lloyd George ousted Asquith as prime minister, the Cabinet and War Committee were replaced by the War Cabinet, and Hankey became its secretary. By the end of the war he had built up an impressive machine for circulating the War Cabinet's papers and a reputation as adviser to the prime minister. In 1919 the War Cabinet was replaced by a conventional

Cabinet, but Hankey and his office remained. In 1922 the Cabinet Secretariat nearly came to grief in the shipwreck of the Lloyd George coalition. But Hankey rescued it from the Treasury piranhas and was able to continue in office until 1938. By then, as Naylor observes, he was an institution in himself, and his office could not easily continue in his image. Without ever losing its identity in the Treasury, as Warren Fisher had intended in 1922, the Cabinet Office has become closely identified with the regular bureaucracy of British government; its secretary is *primus inter pares* among mandarins.

Naylor's treatment of this essential subject reflects a justifiable admiration for Hankey: any scholar must respect a man who keeps his files in such impeccable order. But it is a heroic view, especially of the early work of the Secretariat. Like many historians, Naylor believes that Lloyd George won the First World War by having better methods of government, among which Hankey's secretariat stands supreme. This is certainly what Hankey thought. But there is a dissenting view, which Naylor acknowledges without taking it properly on board. If one looks beyond the Cabinet Secretariat and its impeccable files, one finds duplication of effort among ministries, contradictions in policy, and muddle in the War Cabinet's own deliberations. None of this, of course, was Hankey's fault. The point is that the smooth machinery for recording minutes and circulating papers did not impose sweetness and order on the departments in 1917 and 1918; and the Cabinet was still in a mess despite the labours of its secretary. In December 1916, Lloyd George booted out his political opponents, and thereby increased the rate of decision-taking in the War Cabinet. But his new machinery did not really help him to impose Cabinet control over strategy, which was his main object in overturning the Asquith coalition. Naylor, like Hankey and Roskill before him, believes that Asquith's governments were ineffective because they lost their papers and forgot what

they had decided. Many will find other reasons more compelling.

It becomes more obvious later in Naylor's account that Cabinet machinery is of secondary importance. Indeed, he has little to say about the routine work of the Secretariat after the war except for its retentive attitude to Cabinet papers held by former ministers. His emphasis instead is on Hankey's role as an adviser, with much less attention paid to the Deputy Secretary, Thomas Jones. This ground has been traversed by Roskill. Naylor's contribution is a greater detachment, especially in his willingness to criticize Hankey's sustained resistance to the policy of collective security through the League of Nations. As one reads these pages it becomes obvious why Hankey was not an important figure between the wars. He was obsessed with defence, and impatient with the economic and social problems facing his political masters. By the time defence became everyone else's priority, Hankey's solutions were discredited. 1938 was a bad year in which to be sceptical of air power, a Ministry of Defence, and a European defence commitment.

So, inexorably, the spotlight shifts to the custody of Cabinet secrecy. Hankey spent much of his life trying to prevent public access to the deliberations of the Cabinet. His concern extended not just to contemporary disclosure, but to any revelation at any time. He was prepared to use, even stretch, the Official Secrets Act to that end. His successors maintained his policies, and in so doing prevented him from publishing his own memoirs for nearly twenty years. This served him right, though Naylor is too polite to say so.

Naylor's discussion of Cabinet secrecy thrusts on our attention two points, one of scholarly and one of general interest. The scholarly point is that, on the evidence presented here, the gulf of sympathy between the official mind and the independent historian is almost unbridgeable. In 1934, during the attempt to retrieve Cabinet papers left in the hands of

former ministers, the Cabinet deprecated the claims of any "historian or . . . biographer [who] wished to see Secret Papers in order that he produce a better book", concluding that such an individual "should . . . only get access to the documents if and when they became available in the Record Office." At the time there was no expectation that Cabinet papers would ever reach the Public Record Office, and the Cabinet Office continued to resist any such proposal until some time after the 1958 Public Records Act. In quoting this passage, Naylor notes "the animus against the 'better book' ". Civil servants believe that history is inherently subversive. Historians believe that civil servants are hiding something. No doubt both sides are right.

The more general point, admirably documented here, is that the secrecy of Cabinet discussions has long been purely notional. Richard Crossman's diaries have been followed by dozens of other inside accounts in hard covers, and the leakage of yesterday's Cabinet discussions and last week's departmental minutes is part of the policy-making process. But so long as the Official Secrets Act is used to imprison treasonous clerks, the initiative will remain with the ministers and senior civil servants who make the rules and enforce them on others. Instead of enjoying the right to know everything which can be disclosed without proven danger to the state, the public is told only what it suits the holders of power to reveal. And it is not just a matter of selective revelation. Dozens of Cabinet minutes, now safely in the PRO, testify that the decision to tell lies to the public is often taken at the highest levels. That this is so now can be gleaned by the observant newspaper reader: Naylor's contribution is to document it carefully for a period of sixty years.

The sixth edition of *Mockintosh's The Government and Politics of Britain* (259pp. Hutchinson. Paperback, £5.95, 0 09 156281 3), edited by Peter G. Richards, has been published.

## Recreating the real

Eugen Weber

STEPHEN BANN

*The Choking of Clio: A study of the representation of history in nineteenth-century Britain and France*  
196pp. Cambridge University Press. £19.50.  
052125616 X

EDWARD K. KAPLAN (Editor)

*Mother Death: The Journal of Jules Michelet*  
1815-1850  
227pp. University of Massachusetts Press, distributed by Transatlantic Book Service.  
£19.  
087023 432 3

The nineteenth century was the golden age of history writing or, at least, of its prestige. Stephen Bann's book, slender but dense, is about the representational forms marshalled to express the new visions of the past. It takes off from Ranke's assertion that history should show how things essentially happened; and it demonstrates that the escape from rhetoric, intended or pretended, was just another rhetorical strategy destined to introduce "an integrative poetics underpinning the new notion of history". The argument, if I understand it, is that, as history-writers became increasingly skilled at bringing the past to life, they and especially their readers ran the danger of assuming the authenticity of one particular vision, and of taking "reality effects" for transparent reconstructions of reality.

Tracing the increasing cunning of historiography, Bann begins with the historians of the Restoration: Barante, Thierry, Michelet. But most of his book turns on the inspirations and expressions of the historical form of mind. In historical novels, from Walter Scott to Henry James; in museology (Alexandra Lenoir, the great collector of French antiquities, and Alexandre du Sommerard, founder of the Musée de Cluny); technicians of imagery, like Daguerre, whose diorama spectacles preceded his development of photography; and even in the cinema, with whose historical reconstructions Bann deals in a suggestive postscript that omits neither *Barry Lyndon* nor *Martin Guerre*, but culminates in the achievements of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie.

Bann, who admires Ladurie, nevertheless concludes with Foucault that the very brilliance of his "historical poetics" perpetuates the myth that history can recreate something

real. Which brings him back to one of the first figures cited in a book full of unexpected *rapports*: Charles Waterton, Yorkshire squire and pioneer taxidermist, who showed how beast or bird can be reconstituted "wie es eigentlich gewesen", so that beholders will exclaim: "It is alive!" The historian as taxidermist, bringing the past to life by artifice and skill, is evidence "of the extreme, perhaps excessive, value which our culture places upon the myth of recreating the real . . .". But history is not reality. It may be a science (like taxidermy?), but it is also a myth: "a sustaining Otherness". What is interesting, says Bann, is less the tale told—the poetics—than the relation between the science and the myth. We may appreciate history more, we shall certainly appreciate it better, if we remember that, unlike the Emperor of the fable, a sharp look at the clothing of Clio does not reveal her oaked, but toggled out with too much art to be quite trusted.

I confess that writing about history has always seemed to me less interesting than history, and reading Ladurie or his predecessors brings me more pleasure than reading about him or about his predecessors. But Bann's book is so full of ideas and aperçus that it makes a good read and a suggestive one.

I cannot say as much of *Mother Death*, which consists of passages culled from Michelet's autobiographical *Mémoires* (1820) and from his *Journal* (1821-50), supplemented by a chapter on mud-baths from *La Montagne* (1868). Edward Kaplan (who has also written about Michelet's *Poetic Vision*) began "by wondering at Michelet's 'ghoulish attraction to death', and ended by feeling that historical creation helped transcend the fear of death, personal loss and mourning being resolved by resurrecting the past and its dead. That is as may be. But Kaplan's editorial comments range beyond death—to love, sex, the roots of creativity, and other perilous topics. Thus, the title of the book "evokes the historian's fundamental urge to die and to be reborn"; and in the final account of mud therapy, "death, rebirth, marriage, and incest become one". Squire Waterton had warned that taxidermists could easily produce distortions. This is what has happened in the present case, where Michelet's preoccupation with mortality, lifted out of a more diverse context, appears more obsessive than it most likely was.

Michelet was born in 1798. His mother died in 1815 when he was eleven years old. His

girl he had loved, in 1820; then his best friend, only twenty-two years old, in 1821; then his "second mother", with whom he also went to bed (1823); then his first wife, Pauline (1839); then Adèle Dumesnil, whom he briefly loved (1842), who had herself lost her first four children; then his father, who was seventy-six when he died (1846); then the son of his second marriage, less than two months old (1850); then his daughter Adèle (1855). The litany of loss goes on, and it recalls how near death then was and how often it brushed close. Death-rolls like Michelet's were not exceptional in those times.

Such a perspective need not diminish grief but it helps to explain why dying, death, bereavement, and attempts to cope with them are frequent in nineteenth-century journals as in life; and why exasperation grew against a Church that pretended to offer consolation, when its God was manifestly cruel and unfair, or else helpless. On the other hand, the pathetic ruminations stirred by lingering illness and terrible agony seldom rise above the commonplace; the intimate feelings tend to banality, the reflections are not strikingly revealing or profound. What is interesting is that life and work go on. Great historians are condemned to loss, to grief, as are other folk. Like others, they adjust by clinging to routine: they continue to read or teach, write or day-dream, by the deathbed or returning from the graveside, to pay the servants and go to bed with them.

As Michelet watches Adèle Dumesnil, his first great love, die horribly of cancer, he prepares and delivers lectures, advises her son, pencils notes, makes sure that painters are on hand to sketch her and hangs around "to interpret for them that sad and mysterious object". Two days after her death: "Collège de France. Archives. Fever, solitude." A few years later, when his father dies, he completes a chapter he is writing and regrets not only the loss of a man whom he dearly loved but that of a priceless witness to an irreplaceable past. While this sort of thing can be glimpsed in Kaplan's pages, his selection deprives us of the wider context, and leaves an unbalanced impression of the historian's figure and preoccupations.

As I have said, the book ends on an account of mud-baths taken in 1854, after a long siege of depression and illness, from which Michelet emerged revived and which the editor's title describes as "Marriage With Mother Earth". A

resumed his historical epic at *The Renaissance*, published in February 1855. "The symbolism of death and resurrection is clear. Yet Kaplan could have added that the idea of resurrection had fascinated Michelet long before 1850."

Michelet recorded that, at the Collège de France in 1840, his course on the Renaissance reflected his despair over his first wife's death and what he called the "renaissance" he underwent after meeting Mme Dumesnil. In May 1841, he wrote to Alfred Dumesnil, Adèle's son and his future son-in-law, about his relief in escaping from the stifling Middle Ages just as he had escaped from his grief. The story before him now (he was already preparing that *Renaissance* which he set aside at Adèle's death and took up again in 1854) would be simple and easy to tell, because "L'ayant retrouvée en moi, elle est devenue moi-même . . .". The Renaissance, as he insists elsewhere, is the Renaissance of the heart. Death and resurrection by all means, then. But a book that is only about Michelet and death leaves aside the far more important subject of Michelet and resurrection.

Jules Vallès has told us that he and his friends would go to the Collège de France to get a breath of Michelet, and warm themselves at his words as they would at a fire. This is an image not of death but of life. Death was a fact of life for Michelet as for his contemporaries, not to be panglossed over. And not only death but the dead, not only grief but exasperation, his letters are full of references to the dead who eat his marrow, gnaw his bones, devour his substance. . . . But if he "drinks . . . the black blood of the dead", it is, as in the *Odyssey* he knew so well (Kaplan quotes him quoting it) to make the dead talk, assimilate them before telling their story, and thus resurrect them.

In 1843, after his daughter had married, Alfred Dumesnil, Michelet noted: "so many centuries have marched over my heart! There remains the unconquerable will." What the editor, whose footnote mentions that the words appear in English in the diary's text, does not tell us is that Michelet's allusion is to *Paradise Lost*:

What though the field be lost?  
All is not lost; the unconquerable will,  
And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield:  
And what is else not to be overcome?

Michelet died of a heart attack in 1874, when

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## Stored in the loft

Malcolm Boyd

PETER WILLIAMS  
The Organ Music of J. S. Bach  
Volume III: A background  
309pp. Cambridge University Press. £32.50.  
0521 244129

Bach was a tidy composer. The preoccupation with order and symmetry that characterizes many of his mature compositions (and encourages speculation about esoteric structuring when more obvious types are not present) governs also the grouping of works into larger units, even when neither publication nor integral performance seems to have been part of the composer's intentions. The two groups of fifteen keyboard inventions, the twice twenty-four preludes and fugues for a well-tempered clavier and the various sets of suites, sonatas and concertos arranged in neat half-dozen all bear witness to this. Even the sacred cantatas, which have reached us as a haphazard miscellany, probably bore the appearance of a well-regulated church music when they occupied the shelves of Bach's cupboard in the Thomasschule at Leipzig.

The only important corpus of Bach's music to which these remarks hardly apply is the organ music, much of it earlier than the works so far mentioned. Naturally the contents of the printed volumes (*Clavier-Übung III*, the "Schöbler" Chorales and the Canonic Variations) exhibit a planned (but by no means unproblematic) arrangement, and among the manuscripts the unfinished *Orgel-Büchlein* brings together chorales of a particular type in a liturgical order, while the Leipzig collection of large-scale chorales (the so-called "Eighteen", also unfinished) reflects Bach's interest in giving his earlier music a definitive form. But the preludes, fantasias, toccatas, fugues and other compositions that make up the bulk of the organ music have been preserved as isolated pieces and mostly in copies rather than autographs, with the result that the organ music as a whole raises more problems of authorship, chronology and source evaluation than any other part of Bach's output.

## Thundering in vain

Arthur Jacobs

CHARLES REID  
The Music Monster: A biography of James  
William Davison, music critic of  
The Times of London 1846-78, with excerpts  
from his critical writings  
243pp. Quartet. £11.95.  
070432427X

Mid-Victorian music critics were to be feared, flattered, ceremonially visited, and bribed if possible. Banknotes would be rejected, but probably not a diamond snuff-box. Obscure language such as Bach would have directed to an aristocratic patron was now addressed to the new arbiters of taste. Thus Meyerbeer, after the first Covent Garden performance of *Diogenes* in 1859, wrote to J. W. Davison of *The Times*, expressing

my admiration at the astonishing spontaneity of your perception, enabling you, after one single hearing of such a complicated opera, to penetrate, with single glance into the very marrow of the score; so that no detail escapes you, every aspect of the composer's meaning being interpreted to your readers with absolute lucidity of style and language. Such criticism constitutes a second creation.

"Tongue-in-cheek? No such suspicion seems to have occurred to the recipient or to his new biographer. In *The Times* from 1846 to 1878, and in his own weekly *Musical World*, Davison poured out his passionately partisan, extravagantly phrased opinions. Their length, particularly in view of the smaller number of pages in newspapers of that period, may seem astonishing. Verdi's new *Aida* claimed more than 3,000 words, the first Bayreuth Festival (1876) more than 20,000. Charles Reid, in resurrecting this Victorian oracle, estimates a total output of about 41 million words.

Much of it was written at the Albion Tavern, near Drury Lane, in a snug front room where

The latest and most authoritative survey of this incomparable repertory is brought to completion with the third volume of Peter Williams's *The Organ Music of J. S. Bach*. In his first two volumes, published in 1980, Professor Williams examined separately all the organ works by (or attributed to) Bach, more or less in the order in which they are listed in the standard catalogue of Wolfgang Schmieder. The emphasis there was on sources, variants, musical structure at various levels and stylistic influences—matters dealt with so comprehensively that several reviewers, failing to observe the gentleness of hints in the author's preface, understandably took the two volumes for the complete work. It is to collate and develop some of the issues raised in discussion of individual works that Williams has added a third volume, in which he also takes the opportunity of making some corrections and several additions to the first two. He brings to the task a wealth of experience as an organist and keyboard player, a long acquaintance with Bach's music in general and a knowledge of the history and construction of the organ which has already resulted in two standard works on the subject. The volume under review benefits also from Williams's familiarity (bordering on omniscience) with the organ music of Bach's German predecessors, contemporaries and pupils, as well as that of Frescobaldi and the "old and good Frenchmen" whom Bach is reputed to have admired. The author's detailed knowledge of numerous relevant treatises of the period is equally impressive and put to excellent use, and it is only when he strays far from his central theme (for example, in his remarks on Alessandro Scarlatti's ario basses on page 116) that his scholarship can sometimes be faulted. There is, however, no vain show of learning here. If anything, Williams is too ready to assume a similar range of expertise on the part of his readers, many of whom, I suspect, will find some lines of reasoning difficult to follow. (The glossary in Volume One may be recommended as an aid to understanding some of the technicalities encountered.)

The organ music of J. S. Bach (as Williams persists in calling the composer, evidently afraid to omit the initials lest his readers should

suspect that he has suddenly switched his attention to another member of the Bach dynasty) is discussed under four main headings, each section crammed with fact and informed speculation (the two carefully distinguished) and illustrated with copious music examples. The first summarizes what is known about the role of the organ in church services, the duties and selection of organists and the conduct and content of recitals. In the second section, "The Music and Its Composition", the author traces some of the influences (by no means only the obvious ones) on Bach's organ works. He also takes a dispassionate look at fashionable theories concerning rhetoric, symbolism and numerology, and alerts us, as he has done elsewhere, to the importance of figures, or note patterns, as a compositional basis. As someone not wholly convinced of the relevance of this to the performer, I should have welcomed a more systematic discussion of it in the final section, which is of particular interest to practising organists and includes chapters on fingering, pedalling, ornamentation and other performance details. Preceding this is a section on the organ itself, with specifications of all the organs associated with Bach, careful traditions of the reports he made on various instruments and particularly valuable chapters on registration and temperaments.

Potential readers are warned not to look in this book for subjective descriptions of the music's power and effect; it is taken for granted that these have already been experienced. Readers of a literary supplement need to be told, too, that the many abbreviations, technical terms, bibliographical references and BWV numbers (for which a key would have been useful) give the prose a rather dense texture not inappropriate to the subject. Professor Williams's style is nevertheless precise, scholarly and forceful, and touched with a gentle and pleasing irony. The indefinite article in the subtitle is indicative of the undogmatic approach that underlies this volume, as it did the first two, and I cannot recall another book which makes such frequent use of the question mark. But it is above all in the way it questions assumptions about this "extraordinary music" and its composer that the value of this thorough and challenging study lies.

1880s onward, when promoters and performers recognized from the clearest box-office indications the appetite of the public for Liszt, Wagner and Tchaikovsky as if these composers had never occupied Davison's pillory. Perhaps the main effect of music critics is on other music critics, of whom Reid is one.

Agostini Davison's follies the author might have cited some of his constructive achievements—his recognition of the twenty-year-old Sullivan, his encouragement of cheap seat prices aimed at widening the musical public, his vigorous defence of Cherubini's *Médée*, his lively appreciation of various singers' art. But no, here is only "the music monster", a phrase which seems to have been coined by no contemporary but by Reid himself. There is some carelessness with names, Davison's fellow-critic Charles Gruneison appearing invariably as "Gruneison", and the colloquial style runs into eccentricity as the author alludes to "Arabella's recitalings" and characterizes her three-year world tour as her "most singular and strong-chinned feat".

The chief source of reference for Davison will remain his son's massive memoir (Henry Davison, *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 1912), twice as long as this book. But Charles Reid allows an entertaining glimpse of these derbolts thrown with sublime self-confidence in the wrong direction.

In *Organists of the City of London 1846-1850* Donovan Dawe contributes a record of 1,000 organists in City churches and other institutions, together with brief notes on organs (178pp. Published by the author and distributed by Quill Printing Services, 6 Cross Street, Padstow, Cornwall PL28 8AT. £18. 0. 9505064 0 9). An opening section briefly considers such topics as salaries and rogue organists, and the book also includes an

## Lover-Shadows in the flesh

Phillip Larkin

G. P. WELLS (Editor)  
H. G. Wells in Love  
237pp. Faber. £9.95.  
0571 13329 0  
ANTHONY WEST  
H. G. Wells: Aspects of a life  
406pp. Hutchinson. £12.95.  
009 1345405

H. G. Wells was a man of enormous energy. In 1940 he undertook a lecture tour of America, flying some 24,000 miles to present the British cause; he noted amusingly that his agent had arranged for "accommodating young ladies" to appear wherever he went. He was then seventy-four.

For the energy carried with it a powerful sexual appetite. Wells seems always to have acted on Wilde's dictum that the way to behave to a woman is to make love to her if she is pretty, and to someone else if she is plain. He threw himself at them ("with an increasing confidence of method"), and they threw themselves at him. He saw nothing unusual in this. "To make love periodically, with some grace and pride and freshness, seems to be, for most of us, a necessary condition to efficient working", was his retrospective conclusion after a lifetime diversified and even disorganized by affairs outside marriage. For anyone under the impression that sexual intercourse began with Cremorne Street, *H. G. Wells in Love* will be a considerable revelation.

It is tempting to write Wells down, or even off, in this respect as a man for whom such exercise was a constant physical need, accompanied by no special spiritual or emotional commitment, but Wells did not see himself like this. "I was never a great amorist", he maintains, adding "though I have loved several people very deeply." He regarded his incessant love-making as "the restless dangerous unsatisfying search for temporary assuagement of the underlying desire for the Lover-Shadow" (his own odd term for the imaginary someone who will fulfil his longings, both sexual and social), at the same time being rather dismissive about "incidental infidelities" and more so about "Venus Meretricia". In this he resembles a man who, while insisting that he must have only the best butter, is frequently found settling for margarine or even lard. At a loose end in Washington in 1906, after lunching with Theodore Roosevelt, he takes a cab, not to a museum, art gallery or bookshop, but to a brothel. His experience there is tender and memorable, which is why he mentions the incident; if it hadn't been, it would presumably have stayed unrecorded.

Whatever the nature and motivation of his womanizing, it existed by courtesy of his wife's tolerance. When Amy Catharine (whom Wells called Jane, an odd parallel with the habit of giving servants "house" names rather than using their own) had borne their first son, Wells went off on a bicycle trip for two months without saying why or where he was going. When at last he was findable, Jane Wells wrote to him, not to give him the telling-off of his life, but to say that she was sorry to have driven him away by being over-possessive, and that he would always be free to come and go as he pleased. From then on, Wells had it made, as he sets out in the section "Modus Vivendi" in *Experiment in Autobiography*. A loving and faithful wife and mother, a capable housekeeper and hostess, Jane shared Wells's enthusiasm for amateur theatricals as well as being something of a writer herself. "She stuck to me so sturdily that in the end I stuck to myself", he says rather comically, but in his fashion he stuck to her in return. There was never any question of his leaving her.

The main section of *H. G. Wells in Love* is a document written by Wells in 1934, as a Postscript to his autobiography. He was insistent that it should be published, if at all, "not by itself but bound up with the rest". From time to time he added to it, up to 1942; it remained in typescript simply because people it mentioned were still alive. The narrative is in many ways a strange one. After an initial windy section on "Loves and the Lover-Shadow", and an account of a few early exploits (Dorothy Richardson "was most interestingly jolly on her body"), it develops into a detailed example

of Cyril Connolly's remark that the punishment of continual philandering resides in the successes even more than in the failures.

There was Amherst Reeves ("Give me a child!"), who had to be set up at Le Touquet and whose father made a fearful fuss. Still pregnant by Wells, she married Rivers Blanco White, then refused to let him touch her, expecting to carry on with Wells as usual ("I will not detail here . . . the tensions and exasperations of everyone concerned"). There was Elizabeth von Arnim ("Little e", Jane called her), "who had a teasing disposition and liked to vex me. . . . She developed a queer hostility to Jane." There was Rebecca West ("she demanded to be my lover"), who also had a baby, and had to be set up and visited in the teeth of her family's disapproval; this led to such subterfuges as pretending he was the boy's uncle and



H. G. Wells photographed by Jane, from the first book reviewed here.

she was his aunt ("Neither of us knew where we were . . . we trailed a web of nervous irritation that twisted about us"). There was a young woman "with a face like the Mona Lisa", who turned up at his Westminster flat and cut her wrists with a razor ("My carpet looked like three suicides"); Wells persuaded Beaverbrook and Rothermere to muzzle the papers, but the *Star* got the hold of it, and the *New York Times* followed suit. Finally there was the appalling Odette Keun, whom even Wells called "a thoroughly nasty and detestable person", for whom he built a house in the South of France but found it hard to persuade her to stay there ("I paid her bill at the Berkeley"). Fortunately none of their existences had to be kept from Jane, but sometimes they had to be kept from each other.

To contemplate these liaisons, some of which lasted for years, is to wonder how he could ever have endured them. One explanation is that Wells found it difficult to get rid of women ("This must end", said I, "this must end" — allowing myself to be dragged upstairs"). It is hard to believe that if by pressing a button he could have permanently transported Rebecca West and Odette Keun to the moon (without, of course, harming them) he would not have done so, but lacking this expedient there was nothing to be done but continue the placatory visits and deflect the recriminations as best he could. "He could be intensely kind", one of his own female characters is made to say.

yet he didn't seem to care for you. There was a sort of dishonesty in his kindness. He would not let you have the bitter truth. He would not say that he did not love you. Another explanation is that he enjoyed what he got from them enough to make it all worth while — from Amherst, intense physical pleasure ("in a few days I could be clutching Amherst's fuzzi of soft black hair"); from "Little e", absurdity and laughter ("she was Irish"); from Rebecca West, "the warmest, liveliest and most irreplaceable of fellowships"; even the vindictive and hysterical Odette, apart from "sensual gratification", gave him a base to work in, which after Jane's death in 1927 had become consoling. Both she and Rebecca West thought, with varying degrees of confidence, that now Wells was free to marry them, he could. But by this time there was Moura. He had met Moura Bedbug ("I shall call her

Countess Bedbug", declared Odette wittily: Wells was not smused) in Gorky's flat in 1920, and had an affair with her. In 1929 they met again in Berlin, and later she came to England. "By the end of 1932", Wells writes, "I was prepared to do anything and overlook anything to make Moura altogether mine." There was a certain amount to overlook; she confessed to five other lovers, and he had no reason to "suspect her of an extreme physical fastidiousness". Though possessed of great charm, she was not beautiful; she drank and smoked excessively, and was badly dressed. But her biggest fault was that she did not want to marry him ("I'd be a bore if you had me always"). Ironically, Wells seems to have met someone rather like himself: "She was content with the fun and pleasure of our association, and she was fundamentally indifferent to my dream." In 1934 there was a major quarrel; Wells found out that when Moura had said she was in Estonia she was actually in Russia, seeing Gorky. Wells was filled with anguish (a portrait of him at this time is given in C. P. Snow's *Variety of Men*). He stormed and pleaded, she shrugged and prevaricated. On this note the narrative peters out in a delta of jottings on a year-to-year basis. Wells still dreamed of a wife and home ("Janc plus Moura plus fantasy"), but seems to have known he would never attain it. He remained a widower.

One writes this kind of book at one's own peril. In theory it is easy to rig evidence that will not be presented until no one can answer it. In practice it is a question of tone, of avoiding self-justification and retrospective recrimination. Wells comes out of it fairly well, partly because of his quasi-scientific approach. "I have never been able to discover whether my interest in sex is more than normal", he writes (how he would have loved the Kinsey Report!), and is inclined to believe that what he had was more interest but more opportunity. "Except insofar as affection put barriers about me [the book gives few instances of this], I have done what I pleased." He is without shame: when Odette threatens to publish his letters to her, he tells her to get on with it (a marked contrast to Shaw's response to Mrs Patrick Campbell in similar circumstances), believing they would have little interest except to those "under-exercised in cheerful normality".

But what was normal? If Wells did not set out, or choose to set out, the contradictions in his story, they none the less existed. Whatever the vagaries of his personal circumstances, Wells believed that both in his writings and his behaviour he was fighting what he called "the age-old war of 1900-1914", by which the nineteenth-century taboos and restrictions and restraints on relations between men and women were to be wiped out. His attempt to persuade the Fabian Society to add "public support and education of the young" to its programme was a disastrous failure, older members seeing it as letting Free Love in at the back door, but in opposing the numerous political, economic and social sanctions against women he was on firmer ground. The trouble was that Wells could never quite free himself of the notion that when women were the equals of men they would become like men. Thanks to modern contraception, no one need have children if they didn't want to, and the whole business of sex would become just another agreeable way of passing the time, like golf or cards, something one did in the intervals of writing books or going on lecture tours.

H. G. Wells in *Love*, while plausibly demonstrating the erroneousness of this view, fails to recognize the double inconsistency on which it rests. In the first place, his own radical sexual conduct depended on the remarkable complaisance of Jane; it was supported, that is, by the most Victorian of concepts, the wife required to be chaste, supportive and tolerant of the husband's infidelities which he could therefore indulge without fear of marital disharmony. Secondly, if radical conduct in this context meant anything, it was the creation of a single standard of sexual behaviour for men and women, since for both goose and gander. And when it came to the point, with Moura, Wells found he did not like this. "I became exacting because now I was suspicious and jealous. I have always denounced this ugly condition of mind in theory, but that did not

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prevent my suffering continuously." Had Odette Keun felt like that? Had Rebecca West?

To do Wells justice, he half-acknowledged this in his *Autobiography*. When "a tiresome and obstructive accumulation of obsolete restraints" had been cleared out of the way, the "Woman Problem" remained, "an almost infinite series of variations of the problem of association between men and women, and an infinitude of opportunities for mutual charity". He certainly contributed more than his share to the variations; it is to his credit that he took some of the opportunities they provided to be charitable. He paid bills, made settlements, bought or rented houses, arranged holidays, supported children, devoted weeks and months of his time. This is brought out in Anthony West's *Aspects of a Life*, from which some details in the above account have been taken.

It is a difficult book to review. West was the child of Wells and Rebecca West, and has been working on this life since 1948 with the express intention of setting the record straight – more precisely, the record of the relations between his parents. Few biographies scatter their subject's ashes on page 154, and announce his birth fifteen pages later: West starts the book with his own birth, in order to get at his main topic as soon as possible. This is not, as might be imagined, to defend his mother against his father; quite the reverse. He accuses her of producing "a body of source material documenting her side of the story of their relationship and her view of his character", to the point, he implies, of fabricating letters and diaries in support of her claims. All this is consonant with his characterization of her as both self-dramatizing and dishonest, almost paranoiacally so. Worse, her fictions have begun to be accepted by reputable biographers.

All this may be true, but it is presented, perhaps unavoidably, in a muffled way. West paraphrases his sources instead of quoting from them – presumably permission to do so was refused – but even the reputable biographers are referred to as "an American authority" and the like. Nor do the untruths in question seem of major importance – Rebecca West does not claim that in fact Wells was a bigamist, having secretly married her, or that Anthony West was not Wells's son at all; the distortions concern whether or not Wells snubbed a future Mayor of Croydon in Amalfi, or whether on another occasion he was "actually out of his mind" or (as reported by Arnold Bennett) "in the greatest form". No doubt they are irritating to the author, but to the reader they seem either insufficiently authenticated or insufficiently momentous. West senses this when at the end of the book he mounts a final arraignment of his mother about her conduct during an illness he had in 1928, and how she subsequently distorted the facts to "a disingenuous American academic" (presumably Professor Gordon N. Ray): such matters "can only seem on a first showing to be small beer". The

persistent discrediting of Rebecca West is obsessive: obsessive, too, is the reference to Wells throughout as "my father", which, when it leads to saying that "my father spent the summer with my grandfather", instead of saying that Wells spent it with his father, becomes slightly absurd.

The other side of this, of course, is a highly appropriate wish to dispel the common image of Wells as a pushy journalistic philandering little cad, and show him as a warm-hearted visionary, generous in his dealings and human in his failings. On the whole he succeeds, but without suppressing absurd or damaging incident. Wells's disappearance after the birth of his first son is from West's pages; when the birth of his second son was approaching, Wells took to his bed, "flattened by one of the disabling physical collapses that had been his stock response to stress throughout his early years". Recovering, he spent Jane's eighth month on a walking tour in the Swiss Alps with Graham Wallis, who was moved to protest against Wells's propositioning of every eligible young woman they encountered. Another later revelation is that, instead of withdrawing with dignity from the villa he had built for Odette Keun in the South of France ("It needed an effort", wrote Wells, "but once more the liberating influence was the stronger"), he was in fact "sent packing". Odette had discovered his affair with Moura, and saw all the difference in the world between playing

second fiddle to Jane (who was now dead), and plying it to anyone else. Wells found this hard to understand.

But for the most part Wells emerges as a likeable man who wanted to be happy himself, and was prepared to assuage the difficulties of others he involved in this innocent aim. He cajoled and comforted, but at bottom he was stubborn: he was not going to pretend that any affair undertaken in a spirit of erotic hedonism on both sides could deflect his life's purpose. On less personal issues, the same principle of honesty prevailed. He had no more time for the later James than he had for the later Joyce ("Your lost two works have been more amusing and exciting to write than they will ever be to read"). He went to America and met Franklin D. Roosevelt, and to Russia and met Stalin; he liked one and distrusted the other, thereby incurring the fury of the British left. As well as being happy himself, he wanted everyone else to be happy, to bring into being "the new big-scale life" he felt was within mankind's grasp if only knowledge and wisdom would combine. He did all he could, by writing and lecturing, to realize this vision, but it was not enough. In the context of such an attempt, and such a failure, the vicissitudes of his personal life – no more ludicrous than many another's, and perhaps less reprehensible – seem of small account. It will be a pity if, in the reawakened interest in Wells these books will bring about, he is judged by them.

## A talent for survival

Boyd Hilton

NORMAN GASH  
Lord Liverpool: The life and political career of Robert Banks Jenkinson Second Earl of Liverpool 1770-1828  
265pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £6.95.  
0297784536

The future Lord Liverpool entered politics in 1790 and left them in 1827. By any reckoning this was a time of great excitement, glamour, and importance. And yet the political history of the Liverpool years has only very recently emerged from relative obscurity. The reason for this probably has nothing to do with the period itself and everything to do with the way in which history gets written. In particular the Battle of Waterloo had for a long time a mesmerizing effect on the consciousness of historians. So obvious a landmark in our island story seemed to divide off the eighteenth from the nineteenth centuries, and political historians dutifully followed suit by either beginning their volumes in 1815 or ending them there.

As a result the Liverpool years became nobody's concern. Eighteenth-century historians, whether they followed Namier into the workings of Hanoverian oligarchy or tried to chart the survival of radical and libertarian ideas, had little interest in the years after 1793, when politics lapsed into confusion and liberty capsize in an ocean of reaction. For nineteenth-century historians, on the other hand, the important things – political and social reform, the administrative revolution, the growth of Victorian parties – all came after 1832. In this context the Liverpool years were merely preparatory – a "liberal awakening", as the great French historian Halévy put it. Such perspectives were not wholly unjustified, but they prevented the early decades of the century from being seen as a coherent whole. It is not a coincidence that two of the most convincing general surveys of the period, by Lord Briggs and more recently by Eric Evans, start the story in 1783 and straddle the Battle of Waterloo. Now Norman Gash comes along to dust down the Liverpool years and put them into proper focus.

Those who know Professor Gash's previous work will immediately recognize his great virtues as a historian: control, style, insight, formidable narrative gifts, and above all, perhaps, an enviable ability to empathize with those whom he is writing about. This is not a biography of the monumental importance of the same author's *Peel*, if only because it merely skims the surface of the enormous manuscript deposit in the British Library. This archive is an indispensable mine for anyone who would understand the inner workings of a "governing class" which helped to make Liverpool – in survival terms – one of the most successful prime ministers of all time. Nevertheless, this book is the first thoroughly professional biography of a much underrated statesman, and as such is very much to be welcomed.

Not for the first time, Gash's sympathy with a subject enables him to breathe warmth into what might appear to be a rather cold and remote figure. He certainly has a rare knack of getting inside the minds of nineteenth-century Tories. His own very Tory view is that Liverpool and his fellow ministers sensibly and disinterestedly did what they had to do in very trying circumstances with a minimum of fuss and facon, unlike all those in opposition who yelped high-flown twaddle about the rights of man, without a care for whether they were making the business of government more difficult by doing so. I am not sure that Gash, like the guardians of today's official secrets, always, or sufficiently, distinguishes between twaddle that threatens the security of the state, and that which merely embarrasses the government of the day, but for all that there is a good deal to be said for his view. One can almost admire his lack of any sense of outrage at the concentration of power, preference, and concomitant prosperity in the hands of a portion of the country's elite, and that not the most talented part.

Gash rightly stresses the importance of the 1820s in developing a public doctrine which, in both its economic and its moral components, would serve the country well under Liverpool's successors Peel and Gladstone. There is only

one point of interpretation on which I would take issue. This book does not do much to challenge the common view of Liverpool as a calm, unruffled, "even tempered" and capable manager of men. It is easy to see why this myth has got about. The very fact that Liverpool managed to keep together a cabinet of prime ministers, many of them more talented than himself, which then fell apart immediately after his retirement, suggests that he must have been the soul of tact and a master of man management. But it just was not the case. Nicknamed the "grand figitatis" and "Grand Cross of the Order of Figitatis", Liverpool was constantly in a pet, constantly taking offence where none was intended and giving it by mistake, a prime candidate for the cerebral haemorrhage that was to end his career. Peevish and irritable by nature, he was in some respects a poor handler of men, and he once admitted to Peel that for seventeen years as prime minister he had been unable to open the morning post without a feeling of "anxiety and apprehension" lest it bring bad news.

Gash is of course aware of this side to Liverpool's reputation, but is inclined to dismiss such traits as momentary lapses in a character normally full of aplomb, and as anyway greatly exaggerated by lesser colleagues who did not know Liverpool very well. But it is precisely

with people that one does not know so well that one's nervous irritability is most likely to surface, and in a public man this can be severely detrimental. So while I entirely accept Gash's views as to Liverpool's dominance in government, I believe that the explanation lies in his tremendous all-round competence (he had actually held every secretaryship of state before becoming prime minister) rather than in personal qualities which he did not possess.

This is not a trivial point. The danger in emphasizing governmental continuity from Liverpool, through Peel, to Gladstone is that one may be tempted to read the calm seas of the Victorian age back into the much rougher waters of Liverpool's day. Looking back in 1840 on the period before 1830, Sydney Smith recalled "the old fashioned, orthodox, hand-shaking, bowel-disturbing passion of fear". Now for all his competence, Liverpool was not immune to this. He had actually seen the storming of the Bastille ("horrid work" is Gash's characteristic judgment) and constantly fretted lest hunger, or national bankruptcy, or a licentious press should cause equally horrid work in Britain. It was after all a time when bishops could not show themselves in public without being pelted. Liverpool only became prime minister because Perceval was assassinated, and his own cabinet had to face bomb

plots as well as brickbats. As Gash is very well aware, the years from 1815 to 1821, at least, contained a tangible threat to the social order. In such circumstances Liverpool's public displays of calm and competence were more a matter of strategy than of temperament.

Everyone knows that Disraeli called Liverpool "the Arch Mediocrity in a cabinet of mediocrities", which was plain silly. Less often quoted is the point Disraeli went on to make: "One must ever deplore that Lord Liverpool's ministry, with all their talents and generous ardour, did not advance to principles. These men took expediency for their director." Dizzy had something here. In a time of volatile passions and of wars between great principles, some people thought it was not enough for ardent and generous men to disengage themselves on a pretext of expediency. There is no need to take sides, but if anyone wants to, Norman Gash's volume provides powerful ammunition for the defence.

Christopher Hibbert's *The Destruction of Lord Raglan: A tragedy of the Crimean War*, which was first published in 1961, has recently been reissued by Viking (338pp. £10.95. 0 670 80000 7). Reviewed on March 24 of that year, the book was described by the *TLS* reviewer as "a well-written history of the Crimean War".

## Heading for a showdown

Ian Hamilton

JOHN PIKOUKIS  
Alun Lewis: A life  
322pp. Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press. £12.95.  
0907476260

It is forty years since Alun Lewis died, but his ranking as a modern poet still seems insecure. He routinely gets bundled in with the Poets of World War Two (along with Keith Douglas and Sidney Keyes) but he is by no means an automatic choice for non-specialized anthologies – not in the way that Douglas now is, for example, although Douglas's posthumous reputation got off to a much slower start.

The reason may be that it is hard to decide on a Lewis poem that "works" all the way through. There is an unfinished look to almost everything he did – half a dozen haunting lines, a couple of inspired stanzas, and then the thing seems to wobble into awkwardness or over-emphasis. In *Raiders' Dawn*, the tilt is towards wildness and excess, abetted by Lawrentian self-inflation; in *Hal Hal Among the Trumpets*, there is an almost opposite tendency, an over-mellifluous rhetoric of general wisdom.

There are those who believe that Lewis's future as a writer would have been in prose, and it is certainly true that stories like "The Last Inspection" and "The Orange Grove" have a consistency and self-assurance that cannot easily be located in the verse. But Lewis's ambition was for poetry, and I think his sensibility was too; it was, however, a reflective sensibility and maybe it could only have found its best expression if his words had been allowed to heal.

Alun Lewis was no warrior. His background was in education and socialist good works. Born in a South Wales mining town, he was not from a mining family – his parents were both teachers – but many of his boyhood friends had fathers who tolled underground. Lewis was both of the miners and above them – the "above" meaning that he felt a peculiar obligation to care for their plight and to speak out on their behalf.

The Depression (plus a high-minded literary mother) shaped the essentials of Lewis's almost feverish sense of duty. From early on, though, he had trouble reconciling his dreamy, introverted personality with the ruder requirements of public service. And the war brought this conflict to a head. On the one hand, Lewis wanted to serve, to fight in what he saw as a just cause, and he wanted also to experience some intense kinship with his fellow soldiers. On the other hand, he viewed the war as a kind of high romantic quest, an assignation with self-testing perils, and perhaps with death. He would not

kill, he said at the outbreak of war, and he was ready to "be killed, instead".

In army camps in England, Lewis was torn between an educationalist zeal to improve the hearts and minds of the soldiers placed under his command (Lewis took a commission with misgivings and later rather regretted having done so) and the alienated stance of the romantic bard. He organized debating societies, lectures on world affairs, he wanted to start a weekly magazine; at the same time, though, he was writing poems like "All Day It Has Rained" and "After Dunkirk" in which the fastidious author is painfully distanced from his unaware and cultureless comrades:

[Nightmare rides upon the headloes . . .]

But leisurely my fellow soldiers stroll among the trees.

The cheapest dance-song utters all they feel.

In India, where Lewis was posted in 1943, the same conflict is at work, but with more subtlety and depth. Lewis was both appalled and thrilled by India. The humanitarian individualist was shocked by poverty and backwardness on a scale that simply paralysed goodwill; the fated poet was stirred by the sufferer's benign acceptance of his lot. All the old radical deceptions were made to seem puny and irrelevant; the questing self (or, some might say, the selfish quest) could move forward into mysticism and obsession.

For nearly three years, Lewis had been in the Army without making any sort of contact with the enemy – the longer he waited, the more excited and exalted he became: the Indian jungle, he knew, would be his battlefield and he began to see its lush, intoxicating silences as promising some final spiritual showdown: "a showdown with fate", he called it. At last, with fighting distance of the foe, Lewis was about to set off on a patrol:

Alun was in an excited mood. After shaving and washing, he left the hut carrying his revolver (loaded arms had to be carried at all times) and made for the officers' latrines on the hillside. Shortly after, a shot was heard. Tudor [Lewis's batman] ran towards it and saw him lying about five yards down the slope. The revolver was in his hand; he had been shot to the right temple.

The official Army verdict was Accidental Death, but there was no one in Lewis's regiment who did not believe that it was suicide.

Until now, the details of Lewis's last months in India have been blurred and uncertain. In his writings, there was his persistent representation of Death as the healer of all wounds, the resolver of all conflict, and this has been enough to persuade most readers that his own death was probably no accident. But what was the true source of his agitation? Was it the prospect of finally having to choose between killing or being killed, was it the strain of

separation from his wife Gweno, whom he had married shortly before embarkation, was it to do with his uneasy relations with his senior officers?

All of these circumstantial explanations have been ventured, at one time or another, but John Pikoukis's biography supplies a new, and probably crucial, ingredient. A few months before his death, Lewis fell in love with Freda Ackroyd, a married woman he had met on leave in Madras. For two months, he and Freda exchanged passionate letters and then they spent a week together in Bombay. Back home in Wales, Gweno was puzzled by a new eroticism in Lewis's poems, and indeed scolded him for it, but he could not bring himself to explain what had happened. As for Freda, she had already detected in him something blind and futureless. Immediately after his break with her (not a formal break, but they both seem to have known that the romance could not continue) Lewis was back with his regiment and on the brink of facing his long-

awaited showdown at the front. Freda herself is in no doubt that he killed himself.

This is the first full-length biography of Lewis, and it must be said that in order to make it so, Pikoukis has had to stretch the material somewhat. There are leisurely paraphrases of short stories, lengthy quotations from the poems, and a good deal of unnecessary literary-critical waffle. Also, the tone is cloyingly over-fond at times:

Alun loved his sister. She was for him a type of beauty and sensitivity and he would often put a hand on her shoulder. Filling her with pride and happiness.

Gushy stuff like this sits uneasily alongside Pikoukis's occasional lapses into trendy colloquialism: "At least he told it like it was . . .", "something of a loner, but sociable with it". Still, he has done the work and the Freda Ackroyd revelations alone require that we should not be too churlish about his manner of delivery.

## Most unBondlike

Mark Amory

IVAR BRYCE  
You Only Live Once: Memories of Ian Fleming  
142pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £8.95.  
0297770225

Ian Fleming, the most spectacularly successful writer of the century, is worth a memoir. A competent biographer, John Pearson, has established the facts, and now a friend might illuminate them. Ivar Bryce met Ian Fleming bothers on the beach when he was eight, kept in touch with Ian and saw a lot of him after the war, particularly in Jamaica and over plans to film the James Bond books. In their twenties they both pursued girls enthusiastically and he saw Fleming give one the push, literally, off the running-board of his car. Later he went to Boulestin's by himself and found an equally solitary Fleming, who then read to him from *The Yellow Daffodil*, his self-published book of poems. Already on page seven it is clear that this unnecessary, amiable book is not going to shed much light. Bryce says he was deeply moved by the beauty of the poems; Fleming was soon so embarrassed by them that he burnt the whole edition (or as a bibliophile, he may have kept one, as he did his suppressed book on Kuwait). It seems certain that Fleming's was the more discerning judgement.

Bryce is consistently generous to his friend and ready to accept his pretensions. Yet the interesting thing about Fleming is not how like

James Bond he was in many details but how unlike him he was essentially. Like Bond, for instance, he enjoyed hridge but at the Portland he was known for his timidity and wish to keep the stakes low. When he went with an expedition to explore the subterranean caves of the Pyrenees, he had to stop at the entrance and content himself with watching. But again he was not just a wimp whose fantasies of glamour were imagined with such vivid detail that they became glamorous to others too. As well as possessing great charm, he was an immensely strong character and an excellent administrator. Though the most recent biography of Bill Donovan does not mention it, Fleming wrote a memorandum during the war which outlined the basis of what has now become the CIA.

Bryce, however, is uninterested in the contradictions in his friend, and prefers just to remember the good old days he spent with him, as well as some good old days totally unconnected. Apart from the number of houses he and his wives have owned, and his own activities in intelligence, he seems to have led a pleasant rather than an interesting life.

Although best known as the author of *Three Men in a Boat*, Jerome K. Jerome also wrote drama, short stories, autobiography and a religious allegory, *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*. The *Other Jerome K. Jerome*, edited by Martin Green (197pp. Hutchinson. £7.95. 0 09 155710 0) includes extracts from that work and others which demonstrate the author's versatility.

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# Plotter supreme

## Esmond Wright

**MILTON LOMASK**  
**Aaron Burr:** The conspiracy and years of exile 1805-1836  
 476pp. Farrar, Straus and Giroux/Faber. £15.  
 0374100179  
**AARON BURR**  
**Political Correspondence and Public Papers**  
 Edited by Mary-Jo Kline and Joanne Wood Ryan  
 Guildford: Princeton University Press. Two volumes. £123.  
 0691046859

The most marked distinction between popular and professional history is that at its best the former builds myths and legends, the major feature of which are heroes and villains, whereas the latter seeks to discover the inmost and the most detailed facts, which usually destroy the crudest myths and, with them, deflate heroism, and explain and may even justify villainy.

In the War of American Independence, the villains – the British Army and its Loyalist allies – happily removed themselves, and those Loyalists (perhaps as many as one in five of the population) who stayed at home kept their heads down until memories grew thin. So that, until 1783, there is only one surviving villain, that home-bred traitor, Benedict Arnold. And it would now seem that of the next generation's villains, Aaron Burr, the murderer of Alexander Hamilton and the ring-leader in the Spanish Conspiracy, should never have been seen as a villain at all.

The major conclusion to be drawn from *Political Correspondence and Public Papers of Aaron Burr* and the second volume of Milton Lomask's biography is that, heavily involved as Burr was in the Floridas and Texas before and after his trial at Richmond, Virginia, and ambitious as he was for the West's growth, and his

own, he was not guilty of plotting treason against the United States. In less fevered times the charge would not have been brought before the War of 1812 was fought, and even after it, the allegiance of the men of the Western waters was not to the United States nor to Spain nor to Britain but to themselves; whether frontiersmen, soldiers, or scouts, they were intriguers all the time. Patriotism hardly yet existed. Theories of states' rights, arguments of self-interest, markets for furs and cotton, for corn and whiskey, distrust of eastern finance, indeterminate geographical boundaries and ambitious leadership, all produced a series of plots in the West from the Blount affair to the Burr "conspiracy" that came close to destroying the new state. The charge of treason may even have been in large part the product of President Jefferson's ready imagination – and from neither book under review does the President emerge with an enhanced reputation. There was always something of a vendetta in his prosecution and persecution of Burr.

The charge against Burr owed most to General James Wilkinson, commander-in-chief of the American army (and a paid secret agent of Spain, to whom he was "Agent No 13") who received the cipher letters which he said came from Burr, knowing that they did not, and doctoring them in any case. As T.P. Abernethy proved thirty years ago in his *The Burr Conspiracy* and as Lomask fully confirms, James Wilkinson is the real villain in the story, and one of the most rascally figures in American history. "The most skillful and unscrupulous plotter," wrote Abernethy, "this country has ever produced." The letters almost certainly came, Mary-Jo Kline demonstrates in Volume 2 of her Burr Papers, from Jonathan Dayton, the former Federalist senator from New Jersey, and a long-time collaborator with Burr and Wilkinson in their schemes for speculation in the West. (Kline's own decipherment of what is – by our modern standards – an easy code to break, is itself a masterly and fascinating piece of detection.)

Nevertheless Burr was – as throughout his long and stormy life – his own worst enemy.

Abernethy thought him not guilty on the evidence, but guilty in intent. He was, with all his gifts of inherited ability, his charm and his devotion to his daughter, also extravagant, reckless with money (his own and everyone else's) and with words, plausible, imprudent – and hungry, even greedy, for the affection of men and women. After the duel with Hamilton he was a financial and political bankrupt. He told so many tales and dreamt so many dreams that he came to believe many of them himself. The West, still unmapped and unexplored, was for him and his generation an opportunity for adventure, riches and fame. He had plans for the separation of the West, for the liberation of Mexico (in which his only error perhaps was to be, as he thought himself, a generation ahead of his time), for aid to Bolivar and his compatriots, for aid for the French Creoles and the "Mexican Association", for new republics or even empires (when in his European exile he was talking to agents of Napoleon) to suit his legion of listeners in America and Europe. In his London exile his host was Jeremy Bentham.

The merit of Dr Lomask's biography is to give us the real man, far more human and complex (and a much poorer judge of people), than the near-fictional figure we have had thus far. To it he adds a host of characters drawn from life but in their variety sounding equally fictional – not least Herman Blennerhassett, the Irish aristocrat on his Ohio Island offering Burr a base, and a fortune, to use; and that adventurer-turned-statesman Francisco de Miranda. And Kline's work confirms it by providing chapter and verse in these two superbly edited volumes. She is to be congratulated on producing a two-volume edition, unlike the daunting and all-but-endless Presidential papers series. She produced a microfilm edition (published in 1978) of the Burr Papers that drew on 200 manuscript repositories and collections. And her backnotes in this book's selection, notably on each of the Federal elections, and on the "cipher-letter", are models of their kind.

The removal of the mysteries weakens neither the drama nor the tragedy. In one sense Burr

was the personification of his country's uncertainties through the Napoleonic age. Could it remain a republic or become an empire, as so many of his contemporaries believed, including the man he killed in the duel on the Weehawken heights in 1804? Would the West become French, Spanish, British or Independent, whatever its forms of government? Because he was rejected by the East, ambitious, greedy and frustrated, Burr was indiscreet, even foolish, in his plans and dreams for it. Politics, he said, was a game to be played for "honour and profit". Tragic certainly his career was. He condemned himself to repeated exile because of the murder of Hamilton and his unwillingness to face a trial in Ohio. His devoted daughter's return voyage for a reunion with him in 1813 bringing with her some key manuscripts, ended in her ship's disappearance. And even on his deathbed, when he was eighty, his second wife Madame Jumel insisted on a divorce agreement. Wherever he went he took his storms, as well as his charm, with him.

Like the man he killed in 1804, Burr was a restless colossus who bestrode his world. By contrast many of his contemporaries even as Presidents, with all their sense of responsibility (or because of it?), seem lesser and certainly infinitely less fascinating men. It is not surprising that when Gore Vidal wrote his study of Burr in 1973 he called it simply "a novel". It was told by a not-quite-totally-invented character, Charles Schuyler (almost as much a portrait as was that of Vidal's Burr) and permitted him some savage, for the most part irrelevant side-swipes at Washington, Jefferson and Hamilton. It was well researched, and indeed Kline helped Vidal with the "digging". (Gore Vidal's most recent novel, *Lincoln*, is reviewed by Anthony Burgess on page 1082 of this issue.) What these studies demonstrate, however, is that – with a character as intriguing as Burr, good biographical writing and good editing can stir the emotions as warmly as fiction, and still meet the highest standards of scholarship.

# Negotiating for the negus

## Edward Ullendorff

**JOHN H. SPENCER**  
**Ethiopia at Bay:** A personal account of the Haile Selassie years  
 397pp. Algonac, Michigan: Reference Publications. \$24.95.  
 0917256255

John H. Spencer was probably the most influential American adviser during Emperor Haile Selassie's reign and arguably the most important non-Ethiopian in the higher echelons of the government of that country. Educated at the Harvard Law School and at Paris, he first went to Ethiopia, aged twenty-eight, as legal adviser to a virtually non-existent Foreign Ministry in the traumatic months of January to May 1936 when Ethiopia was struggling desperately to resist the onslaught of the Fascist aggressor. While many accounts of those terrible days have been published, Spencer adds an extra dimension in depicting the situation from the vantage-point of a newcomer deeply involved in the diplomatic and military developments and indeed in the growing chaos and disintegration of that ancient realm.

Though he assisted the Emperor and his ministers for a little while in the early days of the 1936-41 exile, particularly in connection with negotiations, largely abortive and almost always frustrating, with the moribund League of Nations at Geneva, Spencer soon returned to the United States. He was recalled to Ethiopia, as adviser to the Foreign Ministry, in the autumn of 1943, and for the next seventeen years served that country with devotion and distinction. He drafted and negotiated treaties, conventions and constitutions, attended endless sessions of tedious and repetitive United Nations debates, and was prominently associated with the warlike and protracted conferences leading to the Ethiopia-Eritrea federation and the restoration of the Ogaden. His return to Ethiopia in 1943 coincided with

the feverish activities to negotiate a new Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement and he pauses to contemplate Addis Ababa after what he terms, somewhat ungraciously, "five years of Fascist and two years of British military occupation". He is at times apt to lose sight of the fact that the British did not go into Ethiopia in "pursuit of colonial ambitions" or for the fun of losing many good men in battle but in order to win a war which the United States at the time of those events in 1941 had not yet entered. It is, perhaps, a fair criticism of certain aspects of Spencer's book (as indeed frequently in other areas of contemporary assessments) that the exercise of hindsight in the judgment of both events and motives looms a trifle too prominently. At the same time, it is right to stress that throughout his work the author is severe, at times excessively so, with his own alleged errors and misjudgments. Indeed, this pervasive note of self-criticism is one of the most attractive features of these memoirs.

And essentially this is a volume of memoirs, a personal record of events in which Spencer was either actor, observer or critic. Quite properly the years of his personal participation, 1943-60, are described in fair detail (some 200 pages), while the equally crucial years 1960-1974 receive relatively brief, but often perceptive – if occasionally off-beam – treatment.

Where Spencer addresses himself to matters within his direct competence he invariably commands attention and respect, whether one accepts his judgments or not. Much less deserving of such consideration are his occasional forays into gossip (for example, about Ras Kassa's marital arrangements) or general observations about Ethiopian customs (thus the recurrent discussion on Ethiopian names is curiously awry). Saddest of all is his characterization of the Amharic language, which he believes shares with Arabic and Hebrew such elements as sentence structure, while in reality the cacons of syntax are the most prominent and weighty aspect in which Amharic diverges sharply from other Semitic

languages. Throughout the book names and Amharic words appear in the oddest disguises, either mixtures of English and French modes of transcription or unrecognizable concoctions, such as the unpronounceable and ubiquitous "Tch Ghibbi" (Ghibbi is "Palace"), and Tch probably stands for "tatch" ("lower"). But these are minor blemishes in a work which is concerned with different problems.

A keynote of Spencer's book is the assumption of a constancy in Ethiopia's national problems, and he sees a marked parallel between the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935-6 and the "Ethiopian tragedy" of 1974-7 when Ethiopia "embraced Soviet domination". The twin factors in that constancy are the Ogaden and Eritrea. I find it hard to accept this analysis. And although that view is repeated several times (often coupled with Bevin's ill-fated Greater Somalia proposals), Spencer himself advances much more sophisticated reasons in the concluding section of the book.

He is often factually wrong on Eritrea. The Emperors Theodore and Yohannes did not fall in battle in Eritrea; the British Military Administration kept studiously aloof from any commitment to the political future of Eritrea; the massacre of August 28, 1946, was not a "clash between Unionists and members of the Muslim League" but was caused by drunken soldiers of the Sudan Defence Force who ran amok and drove a Bren-gun carrier through Asmara, killing passers-by with indiscriminate abandon – until rounded up by their officers. The culprits were subsequently court-martialed. The author has some harsh words to say about the concluding stages of the British Military Administration in Eritrea in 1952 – but none more puzzling than the accusation that they tore up "the railroad from Agordat to Gondar". Such an act would have required uncommon talents of prestidigitization, for no such railway line has ever existed.

Spencer may well feel on reflection that his assessment of the position and character of Crown Prince Asfa Wossen merits revision. If

he had observed Haile Selassie's concern and solicitude for his son and heir during the latter's illness in 1973-4, he would not have repeated the hoary tales of gossip. As the term *alga warash* (pace p 137) is not a title but a statement of fact (heir to the throne), there was at no time a requirement to designate an heir presumptive. The need (under Article 13 of the Revised Constitution) did not arise until after the Crown Prince's stroke in 1973. As I write, I have before me the tape of the Emperor's vigorous speech in April 1974 in which he confirmed that Crown Prince Asfa Wossen was heir to the throne, and Prince Zara Yaqob, as the Crown Prince's male child, was to be successor to the Crown Prince. Spencer's speculations on this subject seem quite groundless.

The fictitious tales of the Emperor's vast fortune abroad might have been laid to rest by someone as knowledgeable as Spencer, for even the present régime appears to have satisfied itself that there was no substance whatever in the stories so assiduously retailed in the Ethiopian and Western media. The Crown Prince's statement in *The Times* of April 7, 1977, made with the knowledge of the highest Swiss and British banking authorities, seems to have been generally accepted (not least because it is so demonstrably true).

When Spencer returned to Ethiopia briefly from late 1973 till February 1974 he found a country very different from the one he had left in 1960. He lays the ghost of all the ignorant reports about the aystem of land tenure prior to 1974 and gives a balanced assessment of the factors leading to the events of 1974. His final portrait of the Emperor seems to me essentially just. That portrait, and indeed the book as a whole (despite countless criticisms of detail), is a salutary corrective to a great deal of meretricious writing on Haile Selassie and Ethiopia perpetrated in recent years. And the tide is far from ebbing. John Spencer's personal, candid and basically reliable record will have an honoured place in the contemporary annals of that tortured country.

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# Managing and manoeuvring

## Donald Ratcliffe

**JOHN NIVEN**  
**Martin Van Buren:** The romantic age of American politics  
 715pp. Oxford University Press. £28.  
 019 503281

Martin Van Buren, the eighth President of the United States, has long been underrated. Most historians have viewed him in the spirit of John Randolph's dismissive assessment: "an adroit, dapper, little managing man but he can't inspire respect much less admiration". Yet Van Buren, as much as anyone, created the Democratic party; he played a major role in the confrontations of the 1830s; and when he left the presidency in 1841, a beaten man, crowds filled the streets in pouring rain to welcome him back to New York.

John Niven has written a full-length, scholarly biography that has been well received in the United States and is likely to become the standard work. As admirers of his *Gideon Welles* (1973) will anticipate, this new book is full of life, of charming descriptions, dramatic openings, and careful exposition of political manoeuvrings. For the most part it is well-written, though marred by some awkward sentences, uneven type and faulty proof-reading. Through its pages Van Buren the man lives again, though, sadly, Van Buren the politician is still underestimated.

Of humble Dutch origin, Van Buren throughout his life cultivated the manners of a gentleman and owed his early advancement to patronage by aristocrats. Yet, as Niven points out, he turned against each of them, correctly sensing that devious, manipulating political chiefs like Aaron Burr or DeWitt Clinton must destroy themselves by their inconsistencies, since the mass of ordinary farmers had developed a persistent allegiance to the Democratic Republican party of Thomas Jefferson.

Loyalty to that party became the central concern of his career, as he struggled to restore its integrity and power, largely succeeding through the person, popularity and policies of Andrew Jackson.

Niven effectively destroys the view of Van Buren as a mere party manager, a Machiavellian intriguer who would never commit himself on any political question. At various times he risked his political career for a policy or a principle, and no presidential candidate of the nineteenth century publicized his views more precisely or fully than he did in 1836. Though generally willing to adjust his views as circumstances dictated, as President he pursued firm policies that were unlikely to aid his re-election.

Indeed, Van Buren was more concerned with the uses of power than this biography implies. Though interesting on his forty-three day term as reforming governor of New York, Niven slips over his Presidency remarkably quickly, compared to the loving attention given to obscure political manoeuvrings at other periods. Similarly, Van Buren's international diplomacy is not seriously assessed; there is no appreciation that his successful settlement of long-standing disputes as Secretary of State (1829-31) was made possible by revolutionary events in Europe, nor that his formula for ending the war crisis with France in 1835-36 required the intervention of his friend Palmerston.

The best part of the book is the sensitive account of how Van Buren turned against his party in the 1840s, even running against it as the "Free-Soilers" presidential candidate in 1848, when he saw Southern extremism threatening the national unity he had previously worked so hard to maintain through the Democratic party. Yet Niven underestimates Van Buren's earlier work of conciliation: Van Buren's *Autobiography* shows his private hostility to Northern extremism in the Missouri crisis, and his willingness subsequently to help

maintain the slave-owners' hold on the presidency. When the tariff became a sectionally polarizing issue – with the cause of protection appealing broadly to the Northern farmers and not just to the manufacturing interest – Van Buren endeavoured to push through Congress a tariff acceptable to both Northern and Southern Jacksonians, but was less in control than recent historians have assumed, and his efforts, now unrecognized, failed amid accusations of bad faith. As a consequence, Jackson came to power facing a more serious crisis than Niven imagines, and Van Buren's drafting of the Maysville Veto – like Indian Removal, scarcely mentioned here – offered a compromise package which helped to defuse the crisis even before South Carolina adopted nullification.

More frustrating than this weak grasp of the political context of the 1820s and 1830s is the biography's refusal to grapple with some crucial questions. What was at stake in the Bank War, over which Van Buren picked his ground so carefully? When the Democratic party in Congress divided in 1835-37, why did he commit himself to the more radical side? What underlay the breach in the party in the Northern states which helped the South to prevent his re-nomination in 1844? Why were his *laissez-faire* theories considered dangerous by the American business community?

Professor Niven fails to answer such questions because, in the best biographical tradition, he has concentrated his research on the personal papers of leading politicians; and those papers tend to describe politics in personal terms without explaining the contextual significance of issues and elections. Perhaps the truth is that the noble tradition of American political biography, which Niven has embellished, has taken us as far as it can go: perhaps what we now need is a more rounded political history which relates the personalities and values of politicians more closely to the institutional setting they operated in and the pressures they faced from their constituents.

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# Crisis in the movement

Mary Midgley

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*The Feminist Challenge: The movement for women's liberation in Britain and the USA* 252pp. Macmillan. £15 (paperback, £5.95). 0333 3271187  
**HESTER EISENSTEIN**  
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**JULIET MITCHELL**  
*Women: The Longest Revolution: Essays in feminism, literature and psychoanalysis* 335pp. Virago. £5.95. 0860683990

As a cause, women's liberation is as deep, as wide and as fundamental to human progress as the labour movement ever was. As a movement, it is virtually a textbook case of every problem which has plagued every social movement in history. When we look at the women's movement to-day, it is hard to know whether we are looking at a great, ongoing force for change or the terminal stage in a form of politics which has been outdated by events.

Thus David Bouchier, and many readers of good-will will give him a heartfelt echo. Feminism really is important, but it is also extremely confusing. To have two clear, forceful, sensible books—Bouchier's and Einstein's—explaining it is therefore a windfall. Of the two, Hester Einstein's is somewhat clearer, fuller and sharper on the issues, but she deals only with the United States. Bouchier is a fraction more tentative, goes into recent history in more detail, and covers Britain as well as the States, with some very interesting comparisons. As he correctly points out, he is a man. This won't suit everybody, and he seems already to have collected some abuse, but he reasonably asks to be judged on results, and hopes to be specially well-placed to explain matters to other men, which—since somebody has to do it—seems fair enough.

Both writers map out the existing lines of dispute very well. They show how naturally the current confusions follow from earlier theorists' long and systematic skiving at the sight of this topic. If for years you push all the awkward documents into a cupboard, what eventually falls out is always inclined to be daunting. Essentially, much of today's trouble is a nemesis for the vast ambitions of the Enlightenment. Many of those who proclaimed and demanded genuinely high ideals of human freedom and equality instinctively protected themselves from disturbance by tacitly applying these ideals only to a limited group—namely, white males. This protective habit went so deep that remarks on its inconsistency tended simply not to register; they sounded frivolous and unreal. Over the history of negligence, then, the parallel between racial and sexual oppression is real. And the issue does indeed centre in the United States, whose founders, by giving it a constitution devoted to Enlightenment ideals, loaded it far more openly than other nations with a painful choice between profound change and rampant hypocrisy. The difference from Europe is, as so often, one of degree. But it is especially instructive here because Enlightenment ideals are still so powerful with us, yet not omnipotent. The intense individualism developed from them across the Atlantic shows us, as in a magnifying mirror, a possibility which is open to us, but which we do not actually have to choose.

Throughout our century, this individualism has been growing deeper and more assured, yet it has never really been extended to include women. Modern man, who was supposed to be standing fearlessly alone against a competitive world, has still tended to expect the loyal support of his wife in the process, and to change the rules of the game if he encountered a woman as a competitor. This has been a central source of modern feminism, and the two possible ways of dealing with it produced the first main split in the stream. The most obvious response was for women to join individualist men by demanding equality—namely, the right to become just as competitive in the marketplace and just as footloose domestically. Justice seemed to support this claim, and the current reverence for freedom to sanctify it. But the women who attempted it found, on top of

crushing external difficulties, grave moral and psychological objections to it. Most of them did not actually want to become isolated, self-absorbed, Hobbesian social atoms, rattling about together like paas in a csn. They thought this a foolish and mistaken project, and moreover a very destructive one. The alternative was to emphasize difference rather than equality or freedom, asserting ideals like kindness and co-operation as feminine, and exalting them over their male counterparts.

This challenge called, I think, for a very serious reassessment of the Enlightenment ideals, as well as of the current competitive ethos which to some extent travesties them. The moral one-sidedness of western life badly needs attention. Objections to it, however, still usually get dismissed as old-fashioned, as if they must come from some surviving remnant of feudalism rather than from current insights—a habit which is surprising, considering the age of the Enlightenment ideals themselves. When, moreover, the co-operative ideals are put forward as feminine, they tend to be brushed aside on the still more ancient principle that excellence simply equals maleness. Accordingly, this sort of argument is not easily heard at all, and the huge joint effort from both sides which would be needed if we were really to re-value all these values is not forthcoming.



Elizabeth Blackwell and Josephine Butler, reproduced from the book reviewed below.



## Heroines for the cause

Sheila Rowbotham

**MARGARET FORSTER**  
*Significant Sisters: The grassroots of active feminism 1839-1939* 353pp. Secker and Warburg. £12.50. 0436 161133

Margaret Forster describes the struggles and dilemmas of eight redoubtable women: Caroline Norton, whose writings helped to change the infant custody and married women's property laws; Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman doctor; Florence Nightingale; Emily Davies, pioneer in higher education; Josephine Butler, campaigner against the forcible examination of women suspected of carrying venereal disease; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, suffrage agitator; Margaret Sanger, birth control pioneer; and Emma Goldman, anarchist and propagandist for free love.

The emotional and social odds that these women overcame, still, startle even though their lives are now familiar. When Caroline Norton lost the custody of her children to her violent and drunken husband, in 1836, she started to study case law and wrote *The Separation of Mother and Child by the Law of Custody of Infants Considered*. Blinded in one eye by an infection while working as a midwife in France, Elizabeth Blackwell persisted in seeking training as a doctor. Florence Nightingale's family refused to allow her to become a nurse and she was too conscientious to obey them. Instead she rose in the early morning to study government reports on social health. We are told that after reading papers on sewers, drains and garbage, "she got dressed, went downstairs in her silk dress, breakfasted with her family in the beautiful Embley morning room and began her day of 'duties' without once betraying the turmoil in her mind".

This sort of neat cameo is a style in which Forster clearly feels confident. She believes

It is not surprising, then, that modern feminism became somewhat exasperated at this point, and began to split into a number of distinct, embattled factions. Its origin in the disputatious setting of American left-wing politics made this likely anyway, and the fact that it at once adopted Marxist language, with its implied background of endless warring sects and sub-sects, made it inevitable. An immense variety of insights, many of them of great value, then emerged on all sides. But it was amazingly hard to bring them together into any sort of coherent whole. The clumsy nineteenth-century language used for controversy was a bad enough obstacle, but perhaps a still deeper one was the common assumption that writers would expect already to be in agreement. "How can you claim to be a feminist if you say that?" was a reproach heard on all sides. It was really hard to believe how many and how various were the important facts and ideas which had been neglected, and which now clamoured for recognition.

That range is, however, now being grasped. A current generation of more comprehensive books, to which these two belong, bears witness to a serious effort to map out the various strands and place them in their proper contexts before trying to judge between them. Einstein remarks, "I am sympathetic to the notion

of letting a hundred or a thousand flowers bloom . . . But I think it is of great importance to be clear about what some of the differences are, and to discuss them openly . . . I argue that feminist theory has moved from an emphasis on the elimination of gender difference to a celebration of that difference as a source of moral values." On the whole she accepts this move as realistic and necessary, but objects strongly to the separatist consequences now being drawn from it. Loss of faith in the ideal of equality must not, she tells us, result in a loss of all effective social conscience. The admission that men and women are in some way different, and that women have a special moral contribution to make, must not lead to an orgy of self-righteousness which will prevent their working with men of good-will and may end by secluding them entirely in remote communes.

These ideas simply show again the crippling narrowness, the insistence on seeing one's own special theme as the whole of salvation, which are the root of the whole trouble—a trait which only echoes the worst kind of male narrowness. In particular, the change produced in left-wing thinking by simply substituting women for workers or exploited races as the oppressed class, instead of adding them and rethinking the result, is an appalling piece of bad faith, to which black and impoverished women have themselves sharply drawn attention. The rift between "socialist and radical feminism" will somehow have to be healed in a way which combines their best insights, and at present it is the socialist values which are tending to be forgotten. Bouchier agrees on this. Both books supply an admirable guide to this vast work.

Juliet Mitchell, in her collection of essays, also explores sharply the complexities of the tangled feminist scene, pointing out, as she has from the start, the uselessness of one-stop solutions. She is much more patient than I would be with Marx, Freud and a number of other ham-fisted theorists, discussing them in far greater detail than Einstein or Bouchier. Her book is thus much tougher going, but because she has a nose for the real difficulties, it is a useful guide through the worst of the jungle.

this to nineteenth-century liberalism.

But the biggest problem in *Significant Sisters* is the use of the term "feminism". Forster asserts that it is both vague and contradictory. Within limits this is perfectly true; though hardly more so than of such terms as "socialism" or "conservatism". And it is wrong to declare, as she does, that all women who seek any form of change for women are "feminists", especially if they explicitly state that they are not. Surely it is to presume on the privilege of hindsight to proclaim the dead to be mistaken about their own political views? Some of Forster's statements about the feminist movement are over-generalized, others are inaccurate.

Right up to the middle of the nineteenth century the whole emphasis in feminism was on putting right existing wrongs within the accepted framework of society. None of the early feminist activists wanted to overturn that society or alter radically the framework.

Mary Wollstonecraft, the Owenite socialist feminists in Britain and the French socialist feminists of 1848 are thus eliminated from history. We are told that feminists concentrated on single issues. But, like other nineteenth-century radicals, they can be found in broad movements for transformation and, in less stirring times, working locally or in specific campaigns.

Forster goes to some pains to explain this feminism and her subjects are not anti-men. Feminism, she maintains, is not threatening. Yet when she deals with male hostility to women entering medical schools she tells us women learned that "it was better to proceed softly, softly, than aim a knock out blow". As an analysis of feminist dilemmas or as a historical perspective *Significant Sisters* is a disappointment. As a collection of lively character sketches of women who refused the common destiny of their sex and battled courageously through prejudice, heartache and conflict it is often inspiring.

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# Honest Abe's obsession

Anthony Burgess

GORE VIDAL  
Lincoln  
657pp. Heinemann. £9.95.  
0 434 83077 1

In an afterword to his novel *1876*, Gore Vidal confesses to a "deep mistrust of writers who produce trilogies", having just completed one himself, but, not yet presumably having contemplated a novel on Lincoln, regards tetralogists as being "beyond the pale". He does not say why, but I suspect that he considers the spreading of a single theme - American history, for example - over a long fictional sequence as an indication of creative impotence, an inability to invent. In an essay in *Matters of Fact and Fiction* he upbraids certain best-selling authors for preferring "fact or its appearance to actual invention. This suggests that contemporary historians are not doing their job if to Wouk and Solzhenitsyn falls the task of telling today's reader about two world wars and to Forsyth and Trevelyan current tales of the cold war." And if to Vidal falls the task of an earlier war and its hero, one ought to be making a similar assumption about the failure of the professional recordist, when no period in history is better documented than that of the American Civil War, and no hero better served than Abraham Lincoln - from the twelve-volume biography of Hay and Nicolay to Carl Sandburg and beyond. Why write the book at all?

There's a good commercial reason. As I write, *Lincoln* heads the *New York Times* best-seller list. It is not what Mr Vidal calls "quality lit", being as plainly written as anything by Mr Wouk, eschewing - except for a couple of paragraphs in the final chapter - anything like a consideration of the complexities and ambiguities inherent in the character of either Lincoln or his times. As Vidal says of Wouk's *The Winds of War*, "his reconstruction of history is painless and, I should think, most useful to

simple readers". What skill there is in the novel resides precisely in the reduction of a tangle of complexities to a not over-long narrative in which the simple reader will learn the basic facts about Lincoln and the Civil War - namely, that Lincoln was no more against slavery than Washington and Jefferson had been, and that the Civil War, which was wasteful and inefficiently fought, was waged for an abstract idea - the conservation of the Union.

The novel of the period which raged effectively against slavery is not even mentioned, probably because Uncle Tom has taken on the wrong resonance among progressives, and in spite of the fact that Lincoln greeted its author with the words "So this is the little woman who made this great war." Readers who expect Simon Legree and large battle scenes out of *Gone With The Wind* will be disappointed. There is no sensationalism and, despite the multiplicity of brothels in Washington, no explicit sex - though we do learn the etymology of *hooker* (General Hooker's girls). Vidal is mainly concerned with a metaphysical question - the Union and the ascension of the Union - and it is this obsession with the Union which makes Lincoln bizarrely impressive and even, in his quiet way, manic. But it does not make him much of a figure for fiction.

Vidal, to his credit as a fiction-writer, does his best with the long, lean, ascetic figure unblemished by self-doubt, cursed with constipation, a born politician but totally incorrupt, unless his blazing faith in the Union be a form of corruption. The corruption is discussed belatedly in the last chapter, where, at a reception at the Tuileries, John Hay, formerly Lincoln's secretary and prospective co-author of his biography, meets a character from *1876* - the wholly fictional Charles Schermerhorn Schuyler. Hay, placing Lincoln above Washington, says that he had a far more difficult task than the first president:

"You see, the Southern states had every Constitutional right to go out of the Union. But Lincoln said, no. Lincoln said, this Union can never be broken. Now this was a terrible responsibility for one man to

take. But he took it, knowing he would be obliged to fight the greatest war in human history, which he did, and which he won." And then Schuyler speaks of Bismarck: Curiously enough, he has now done the same thing to Germany that you tell us Mr Lincoln did to our country. Bismarck has made a single, centralized nation out of all the other German states.

We, with the gift of hindsight, are thus made to wonder whether Lincoln did the right thing.

And yet, in the body of the book, this mystique of the Union is not fully explicated. There are hints that it may be a geographical concept, finding a logical conclusion in the annexation of Canada as well as Mexico, servant or master of a new technology of railroads and telegraphs which makes devolution obsolete, history working through the apparently insentient Lincoln to bring about the modern American whose fat rump is ready for the laws of Mr Vidal. We need a poet somewhere in the book who can display prophetic insight, but all we have is a rather humble Walt Whitman looking for a job and the transcendentalist author of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic". It seems to be part of Vidal's brief to depoliticize to the limit. This is, of course, essential for a commercial enterprise.

The setting is Washington and environs. Vidal leaves the log cabin and rail splitting to legend and begins his story with Lincoln's arrival in the capital for his inauguration. The author's affection for a city which he has described as having the charm of the north and the efficiency of the south is as evident here as elsewhere. It is very well rendered, with its canal described twice as "odiferous" (an obsolete term which Vidal likes, since he uses it also in *1876*), its fried oysters and spittoons, mosquitoes and fever which everybody catches - even Lincoln, though only once. The presidential home which Mrs Lincoln inherits is a mess of dirt and dried tobacco-spill, but she soon puts it right. She spends too much, gets into debt, cooks the books, eventually goes mad. She also has Confederate connections. The suspicions which attach to Caesar's wife never touch Cæsar: Lincoln's heroic stoicism is matched by total integrity. Inevitably, supporting characters such as Chase, the State Treasurer but always in money trouble, have more of the interest proper to fiction. Sprague, the "boy governor" of Rhode Island, is of exceptional interest. Through his marriage to Chase's daughter, Chase's own fortunes improve, but Sprague's fortune depends on the illegal, indeed treasonous, importation of cotton. This is the real stuff of fiction, though it is also fact.

Vidal takes the character of the young David Herold, whom history hears of only in connection with the Booth conspiracy, and builds him up, though to little purpose. He works as a dispenser and delivery boy in Thompson's drugstore, which, in the interests of dramatic compression, is placed closer to the White House than it actually was. David is a supporter of the Confederacy who acts as a spy, crossing the Potomac with impunity to make his deliveries and passing on coded messages. Both Mr and Mrs Lincoln need laudanum, and Lincoln also needs a massive weekly purgative: the opportunity to poison the President seems always to be there and yet not there. Booth shoots him, without crying "Sic semper tyrannis" (we're in the wrong market for a quote from *Cato*), and David fails to kill Secretary of State Seward. There is too much of David: he is not interesting enough to justify the space allotted. He is really there to feed Vidal's hunger to invent.

He, one of the most inventive novelists modern America has produced, must have felt damnably oppressed by the need to follow history. It must have been especially oppressive when the moment approached for the re-enactment of a scene that is so historic that it seems already to have been invented. When Gettysburg is first mentioned, we settle in our seats and prepare not only for the Address many of us have by heart but for a chance to judge the author's ingenuity in washing it clean of its sentimental accretions. Vidal comes through remarkably. He does not give us what we know - "Lincoln's final tinkered-with draft" - but what Charles Hale of the *Boston Daily Advertiser* wrote down. And he breaks it up with clever dramatic insertions:

"We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We are met to decide if we shall live or die for the Union, or for the Union as it was, or for the Union as it is, or for the Union as it may be."

place of those who have given their lives that the nation might live." Seward nodded, headstrongly. Yes, that was the issue, the only issue. The preservation of this unique nation of states. Meanwhile, the photographer was trying to get the President in camera-frame.

As for the assassination, this is flat and over-perfunctory - something that happened and had best not be brooded upon. Vidal spends a good deal of care on the background and character of the assassin, but the more we learn of him as an extrovert actor the less we are able to accept him as an avenger of the stricken South. The final words of the book are:

"It will be interesting to see how Herr Bismarck ends his career," said Hay, who was now more than ever convinced that Lincoln, in some mysterious fashion, had willed his own murder as a form of atonement for the great and terrible thing he had done by giving so bloody and absolute a rebirth to his nation.

This turns Booth into a mere shadowy device of expiation and the final scene in the theatre into a yawning anticlimax at mass rather than a catastrophe of world-shattering proportions. "Rebirth to his nation" is probably, given Vidal's cinematic background, a deliberate device to evoke the fourteenth Amendment, the carpetbaggers and the Klu Klux Klan. The interesting, or Vidalian, things are often on the margin in this novel, and all the rest is history sedulously followed and minimally dramatized. It is a novel not of great battles but of telegrams about them arriving at the White House.

So that the novel itself seems only to be a device for awakening wonder at the historical actuality; it points at history without heightening it through art. In this respect, *Lincoln* belongs to that popular and very American pseudo-fictional genre which Mr Vidal, concentrating particularly on Mr Wouk, condescendingly accepts as wholesome if simplistic teaching but condemns for pretending to be a kind of literature. Irving Stone has written on Michelangelo, Freud and Darwin in much the same way ("sighing, he lighted a fresh cigar, and wrote his title: *The Interpretation of Dreams*"). James A. Michener has made a vast fortune out of blockbusting history tomes, well-researched and indifferently written, which are presented as novels. There is something in the puritanical American mind which is scared of the imaginative writer but not of the pedantic one who seems to humanize facts without committing himself to the inventions which are really lies.

In putting himself beyond the pale as a tetralogist, Gore Vidal is in danger of making the wrong sort of reputation for himself - the popular recorder of American political history, and not the brilliant scabrous fantasist of *Myra Breckinridge* or the revivifier of the remote past as in *Julian and Creaton*. His recent *Duluth* remade the geography of the United States, created a new kind of aschology (when you die in Duluth you go into a television screen called *Duluth*), and smote American mores hard through every technique available to modern fiction. *Creaton* was a remarkable attempt to depict the age of Darius, Xerxes, Buddha, Confucius, Herodotus and Socrates. Both highly-scented spirit and imaginative penetration of ancient history should be enough for him. But he cannot leave American politics alone. I am not altogether sorry that he has written *Lincoln*, since this ghost has sent me back to the flesh and blood reality, but his writing could have been left to any best-selling American who, short of a subject, found Honest Abe as good as any.

Things are looking up for Charles Paris, Shonou Brett's aging, often drunken, more often out-of-work actor. In the course of the latest instalment of his life, *Not Dead, Only Resting* (176pp. Gollancz. £7.95. 0 575 03438 6), he's offered not one, but two engagements; neither, unfortunately, on the stage. One is as a decorator, the other as a detective, hired to look into the murder of Yves Lafey, partner-owner of a fashionable restaurant, who appears to have been killed by his partner Tristram Gowers after a lovers' rift. The plot could be a little tighter, and Charles is unforgivably slow in making one deduction, but the thespian and caric scenes are wonderful, by well done, full of a rich assortment of well-observed comic characters. But can Charles really be going to make things up with

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## From wonders to prodigies

Adam Mars-Jones

ANGELA CARTER  
*Nights at the Circus*  
295pp. Chatto and Windus/The Hogarth Press. £8.95.  
0 7011 39323

*Nights at the Circus* doesn't so much start as break like a wave; the first third of Angela Carter's new novel is a glorious piece of work, a set-piece studded with set-pieces. The narrative has a splendid ring momentum, and each descriptive touch contributes a pang of vividness.

The period is 1899; the central character is Fevvers, "The Cockney Venus", currently the toast of London as of most European capitals. Fevvers's fame is not earned merely by beauty; at close quarters, in fact, she looks "more like a daisy mare than an angel". Her face, "broad and oval as a meat dish, had been thrown on a common wheel out of coarse clay". But she has wings, which may or may not be real; at all events, her trapeze act at the Alhambra is good enough for her to be pelted with bouquets night after night. A tour is looming with Colonel Kearney's circus, to St Petersburg, to Tokyo, and from there to America.

Before she leaves, she grants an interview to Jack Walsler, a young and very sceptical American reporter; although she has given one vigorous performance already, earlier in the evening, she puts on another for his benefit. With corrections and embellishments from her foster-mother, now acting as her dresser, she tells the story of her life.

Hitched - brought up in a brothel - first fights - kidnapped - escape - first engagement at the circus. Fevvers tells her story with great relish and in extravagant detail. The voice belongs to Fevvers, but the point of view is the journalist Walsler's, intrigued but basically unconvinced; the reader's complex nature, hungry for enchantment but also resistant to it, is beautifully served.

The only false notes in this section are anachronistic literary tags: when Fevvers describes Madame Schreck's museum of female freaks as "this lumber room of femininity, this rag-and-bone shop of the heart", what should the reader make of the quotation from late Yeats? It must be deliberate, since the sentence can do quite well without it; the second phrase, in fact, rather blurs the first. The poem in question (ending "I must lie down where all the ladders start, / In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart") is called "The Circus Animals' Desertion", which is clearly in some way relevant; but is the reference Fevvers's, or Angela Carter's? If it is Fevvers's then she is more than a marvel, she is a literary prophet, and the possibility of her fraudulence (important for the balance of the section) must disappear; but if it is Angela Carter's, then why is she interrupting her creature to invoke (in a novel about a winged woman) a poem about the renunciation of the imaginary?

Perhaps the verbal echo is no more than a consequence of reading Yeats late at night, like a dream induced by cheese; but its briefly disruptive effect calls attention to a real danger. A book like *Nights at the Circus* depends for its effects on a privileged relationship with a real world, a selective overlapping. If it is tied too closely to the actual, it will soon appear preposterous; if it strikes out too far on its own, it is likely to become empty and precious.

Angela Carter is on the whole very good at watching over her story's delicate status, at restraining (but not abolishing) its reference to a historical 1899. It is noticeable, for instance, that she refers freely to "Toulouse-Lautrec, whose poster of Fevvers hangs in her dressing-room; but guardedly to a "Scottish gentleman with a big beard"; presumably Carlyle, who left his library to the madam of the brothel in which she was raised. Is it a matter of personality that only one of these historical figures can function safely in the fiction (Toulouse-Lautrec taking easily to myth, Carlyle resisting translation), or is it a matter of nationality? Perhaps to be French, to the uneducated unconscious, is to be less starkly actual in the first place.

The balance between the earthbound and the merely windy, in any case, is a delicate one;

but it is held throughout the book's first section. Some sentences are avowed with brilliant effects, but they never actually burst; the riches are never quite embarrassing.

The balance tips at the beginning of the second section, and never manages to return to equilibrium. If France has an intrinsic implausibility, how much more is Russia (where the story takes up) already a fiction? Russia's revolution, moreover, makes its nineteenth-century seem absolutely distant, in a way that nineteenth-century France does not.

The first pages of the second section, set in St Petersburg, show all the signs of a belated attack of nerves. The descriptions are erratic; some of them are subsequently attributed to Jack Walsler, who has joined the Circus as a clown, sending bulletins back to London.

The point of view is confusing, and the sentences lose their sense of mission:

The toll-missage back of the babushka bowed before the bubbling urn in the impotently submissive obeisance of one who pleads for a respite or a mercy she knows in advance will not be forthcoming, and her hands, those worn, velvety hands that had lavoluntarily brushed the handles of the bellows over decades of use, those immemorial hands of hers slowly parted and came together again just as slowly, in a hypocritically reiterated gesture that was as if she were about to join her hands in prayer.

There is some mimetic monotony here, to be sure, but also some clumsiness; it just goes to show (as the book's last sentence informs us) there's nothing like confidence.

Without Fevvers's voice and Walsler's point of view the narrative falters. There were just as many impossibilities in the London section as there are in St Petersburg, but now they are presented directly rather than mediated through a character who may only be a charlatan or a freak. The various clairvoyant pigs, intellectual chimpanzees and depressive downs of the circus don't exactly upstage Fevvers, but they certainly dilute her oddity in a way that does the book harm.

It's fair enough that Fevvers should have a rest after her stupendous performance in part one; but the entry act goes on indefinitely. By the time W.B. Yeats raises his lovely but distracting head again, this time in a description of Buffo the clown, the reader's doubts have grown substantially: "Things fall apart at the very shiver of his tread on the ground. He is himself the centre that does not hold."

The point of view becomes curiously fragmented, tending to see Fevvers through Walsler's eyes while supplementing this partial perspective with a feverish omniscience elsewhere. At one point, when Fevvers with reluctant good nature is giving succour to the abused Mignon, whom she assumes to be Walsler's lover, the reader gets not only Mignon's past from childhood up, but also several paragraphs on the life of her first employer, a spiritualist photographer, after she left him.

The point of view supplies, in other words, not only background information about Mignon that Fevvers and Walsler never learn, but also facts about her previous keeper's later life that even Mignon doesn't know. These compulsively elaborated histories are likely to baffle the reader, and weaken the focus of the book.

A little after half-way through the novel there occurs the first scene of Fevvers in private, and some of the later sections are narrated intermittently by her in the first person; but the achievement of the first section is not repeated. As the story moves from St Petersburg to Siberia, Angela Carter piles on the prodigies until everything is equally miraculous - except that a miracle needs a humdrum context, or at least a whiff of the mundane, to set it off.

Time and Space lose their authority; Fevvers, escaping from a Grand Duke's sinister advances, runs from his mansion to the railway station in the few seconds of his lapse of consciousness after orgasm, though it is also suggested that she has shrunk down to the size of the Duke's jewelled toy train and escaped in that. Later Jack Walsler, separated from the rest of the party, spends months with a shaman and his tribe, while for Fevvers the same period lasts only days.

Despite the freedom of its phantasmagoria, the book retains a wistful ambition to say something about a real 1899; the violent events in store for St Petersburg are mentioned a number of times, always with the disingenuous

comment that they have nothing in common with this narrative. Fevvers and her foster-mother, moreover, turn out to be sending back "news of the struggle in Russia to comrades in exile"; this is frankly a bit much, since *Nights at the Circus* at its best is quite resonant enough to need no relevance imposed on it. Any aerialist is entitled to a safety net; but not more than one.

There are passages of brilliance right to the end of the book; tigers in particular bring out the best in Angela Carter. Tiger at large: "It came out of the corridor like orange quicksilver. . . . It did not so much run as flow, a queuing sluice of brown and yellow, a hot and molten death." Then, having squandered her first batch of tigers in a train crash (the impact makes them fuse with the mirrors), she produces some fresh ones, "stretched out across the tiles like abandoned greatcoats, laid low by pleasure. . . . you could see how the tails that dropped down over the eaves like icicles of fur were throbbing with marvellous sympathy"; a "thatch of swooning tigers".

A world in which tigers under pressure combine with mirrors (and in which clowns summon up a wind that blows them clean away) is clearly one in which pain and death have a modified status. That is perhaps one of the surprises of the book, that it appeals so single-mindedly to a sense of wonder, and insists so little on darkness. There is confusion, certainly, even madness, but there is also a lot of straightforward healing-power-of-love. Even at the lowest point of Jack Walsler's fortunes, when he is living in Siberia with a shaman and almost no memory, his adventures (and particularly the way he is smoothly absorbed by the shaman into his world-view) are played for genial comedy. It is noticeable that only the evil Grand Duke, of all the characters in the book, is given nothing in the way of a history; the book's summoning-up of evil is almost perfunctory.

*Nights at the Circus* starts off in full commanding cry, and later disappoints the towering expectations it has created for itself. The irony of this is that its early success is so clearly analysed in Jack Walsler's comments on

Fevvers's trapeze show; the music went faster than she did; she dawdled. Indeed, she did defy the laws of projectiles, because a projectile cannot *moosh* along its trajectory; if it slackens its speed in mid-air, down it falls. But Fevvers, apparently, potted along the invisible gangway between her trapezes with the portly dignity of a Trafalgar Square pigeon flapping from one proffered handful of corn to another, and then she turned head over heels three times, lazily enough to show off the crack in her bum.

By doing possible things impossible well, the first third of the book achieves a major enchantment. The spell, though, is fragile, and depends on the novel neither quite corresponding with reality nor finally breaking with it, just as Fevvers must be neither proven fraud nor proven freak to be an extraordinary woman: "If she were indeed . . . a prodigy, then - she was no longer a wonder."

This is the principle that is forgotten as the novel speeds off towards the orthodox strangeness of exotic places and prodigious events, where other laws than the laws of projectiles are merely violated and an impasto of impossibilities overlays the original teasing design: "It was the limitations of her act in themselves that made him briefly contemplate the unimaginable - that is, the absolute suspension of disbelief".

Gore Vidal is "in conversation" with Lorna Sage today, Friday September 28 at 1pm at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, The Mall, London SW1; Angela Carter will discuss *Nights at the Circus* with Adam Mars-Jones, also at the ICA, on Thursday October 11 at the same time; and on Wednesday October 3 Martin Amis will discuss his new novel *Money* with Ian McEwan. Both *Nights at the Circus* and *Money* (to be reviewed in next week's *TLS*) are surprising omissions from the shortlist for this year's Booker McConnell Prize, which comprises: *Flaubert's Parrot*, by Julian Barnes; *Hotel du Lac*, by Anita Brookner; *Empire of the Sun*, by J. G. Ballard; *According to Mork*, by Panelope Lively; *Small World*, by David Lodge; and *In Custody*, by Anita Desai. Another omission, that of Muriel Spark's *The Only Problem*, is inexplicable.

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# Sisters with the devil in them

Craig Raine

JOHN UPDIKE  
*The Witches of Eastwick*  
311pp. André Deutsch. £8.95.  
0394 537602

"A cold coming we had of it", T. S. Eliot's famous line takes on new meaning after one has read *The Witches of Eastwick*. John Updike's deceptively playful, intricate and absorbing look at feminism, evil and the cosmic set-up. Darryl Van Horne, a first dan of the adultery belt, shows "supernatural control, and when he did come his semen, all agreed later, was marvellously cold". After his arrival in Eastwick, a small town on Rhode Island, the familiar desolate couplings are replaced by triplings, lesbian orgies and even a session with a dog.

Van Horne, it soon becomes clear, is a devil. Hence the traditionally chilled ejaculate, authoritatively reported as long ago as 1622 in Pierre de Lancer's *L'Incrédulité et l'incrédence des sorciers* by one Jeanette d'Abadie, who also volunteers the information that the devil's member is scaly and painful. Van Horne's is merely uncircumcised and "empurpled" when erect. Just the same, Jane Smart, one of the titular witches, "atill ached, at both ends of her perineum". Van Horne stretches the women physically and artistically: a reporter is encouraged to become a novelist (though a sample of her prose is hilariously calculated to undermine this ambition); a sculptress is guided from miniatures to monumentalism; a cellist to improvise her technique.

Much of the fun of Updike's novel is in establishing the supernatural dimension against the reader's expectations. Or that, at least, is the intention. In practice, though there are some deft transpositions, the enterprise is much less successful than, say, Ian McEwan's "Reflections of a Kept Ape", a story which is narrated by the ape himself in fine ball-tetrist style. McEwan's *donnée* is so outrageous that the reader's hermeneutical instinct frantically reaches for plausible allegory - only to be confronted by some irrefutably ape-like fact, as when the ape sweeps up spilled papers with his left foot. In Updike, the ambiguity evaporates fairly quickly, though it is fun while it lasts. For instance, we are blandly informed that Alexandra's former husband now "rests on a high kitchen shelf in a jar, reduced to multi-colored dust, the cap screwed on tight". We are invited to assume he has been cremated. The phrase quoted leaves room for this possibility. A page later, however, we learn that "the other witches had experienced similar transformations in their marriages; Jane Smart's ex, Sam, hung in the cellar of her ranch house among the dried herbs and simples and was occasionally sprinkled, a pinch at a time, into a philtre, for pliancy; and Sukie Rougemont had permanized hers in plastic and used him as a place mat".

Early in the novel, too, one enjoys the double-entendre which accompanies words like "cackling", "damn", and phrases like "the devil was getting into her". "the damnedest thing happened back in there just now", as well as mention of "devilled eggs" and Van Horne's red-hot cocktail snacks. When Van Horne asks Sukie to kiss his arse "in the middle" because it gives him "a helluva boost", scholars of the occult will recognize the *osculum infame* of the traditional sabbat. Ordinary readers should turn back to the epigraph taken from Agnes Sampson, whose testimony was preserved for posterity in Robert Pitcaim's *Criminal Trials in Scotland* (1833). "the devil... caused all the company to come and kiss his arse". Traditional features like storm-raising are also planned in the narrative. After a while, it begins to look somewhat researched and pedantic, particularly since, when Updike actually invents, the magic is terribly banal - balls metamorphosing while a tennis match is in progress (twice) and the transformation of a wooden spoon.

Van Horne, who is an inventor; is more successfully conceived, partly because he is seen exclusively from the outside, except for one moment when we are vouchsafed his thoughts. Despite the nudging name, Updike presents him well. Some of his diabolic features reveal themselves only on a second reading: his trousers, for instance, bag at the back

of his knees, inviting the reader to imagine a satyr; the personalized initials on his possessions change disconcertingly, suggesting an assumed human identity, as does his seamed face, which is not merely lined but a construct. His speech, too, is a torrential yet robotic simulacrum. The sulphurous smell in his hall-way seems merely chemical for some time.

But *The Witches of Eastwick* isn't simply a comic soufflé. There's something more substantial here which is best anatomized by looking at the minor characters. Felicia, the smug, nattering, intellectually deaf wife of Clyde Gabriel, a newspaper editor, provides a clue to the governing design - before her husband looks up from the open fire and despatches her with a little murderous pokerwork. She is against the war in Vietnam, pornography, capitalist exploitation of ecological resources - a veritable supermarket of liberal indignation and democratic gripes, though she doesn't actually like people. Compare the leftie parson, Ed Parsley, who eventually blows himself



up making bombs. He also wants to buck the system.

So does Van Horne - but on a larger scale. As an inventor, he is looking for a loophole in the second law of thermodynamics. As a devil, he is against the cosmos. Where God said, "Let there be light", Van Horne prefers black sheets on his bed, black couches in his sauna, and preaches a notably secular sermon against the horrors of God's creation - from predaceous anthropods, through the syphilitic spirchete, to the lung fluke and the tapeworm. "So vote for me next time, OK?" he concludes. But, as Updike shows us, the devil is not creative but parasitical - inversion, not invention, is his métier. By the end of the novel, Van Horne has invented nothing, gone bankrupt and disappeared with another man - the final inversion. Not that this needs spelling out: Van Horne's attitude to art has already blown his cover. As a musician, he is only capable of variations on a given theme - "The Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square Boogie" and "The How High the Moon March". His collection of pop art is, significantly, Jim Dine, Kienholz, Oldenberg - "travesties of the ordinary".

Clyde Gabriel, on the other hand, puts his trust in Lucretius and the idea that all things operate according to their own laws, without a supernatural sanction. For him, the cosmos is an "implausible spatter of stars" and creation has come into being accidentally, by a fortuitous averting of atoms. Like Lucretius, he commits suicide - after murdering his wife for disturbing this cosmic peace with her jabbering discontent. The description of the suicide, incidentally, is one of the best passages Updike has ever written - flawless, detailed, unflinching and horribly pessimistic. Just before he dies, Clyde reverts to his adolescent self, the boy who saw no conflict between science and religion. Working out the logistics of hanging himself, he is suddenly taken by the architecture of the staircase. For a moment, the argument from design convinces him: "it was all clear as rectified type". Updike, however, wipes this illusion away, as the rope tightens around Clyde's neck, with one terrible, poetic sentence: "thin as redness in his over-stuffed skull was followed by blackness, giving

way, with the change of a single letter, to blankness". The witches, Alexandra, Jane and Sukie, are also bucking the system. They hate housework and neglect their kids (a neglect which is only unrealized by Updike, since usually he is brilliant with the quiddity of children). Without husbands, they are free to have affairs and to fulfil themselves. Clearly, this is related, in Updike's mind at least, to feminism: "so many of Alexandra's remarkable powers had flowed from this mere appropriation of her assigned self, achieved not until midlife. Not until midlife did she truly believe that she had a right to exist, that the forces of nature had created her not as an afterthought and companion - a bear rib, as the infamous *Malleus Maleficarum* had it - but as a mainstay of the continuous Creation...". On the next page, we are offered a psychological curriculum vitae in summary: "Alexandra's fat bare toes, corned and beatty years in shoes shaped by men's desires and cruel notions of beauty...".

Instead of marriage, drudgery and compliance, the witches give their loyalty to their triune sisterhood. Their adulteries are fuelled by pity as much as desire: "healing belonged to their natures, and if the world accused them of coming between men and their wives... not merely accused but burned them alive in the tongues of indignant opinion, that was the price they must pay". Those burning tongues are an example of Updike's fudged equation between the natural and the supernatural: the craftsman hammering a screw into the wall, botching the job.

So much for the programme and the liberalist theory. Gradually Updike withdraws his sympathy. In no time at all, the sisterhood is beset with internal jealousies and insistent egos, despite the best endeavours. The artistic aspirations, set in train by Van Horne, come to nothing. More importantly, Updike shows that the feminist myth of the gentler sex - the idea that women would exercise power more responsibly than men - is simply sentimental. These witches casually kill squirrels and dogs out of irritation, torment other women and conclude by giving a fatal dose of cancer to a woman of whom they are jealous. Not even Alexandra's espousal of Nature as a Nietzschean seethe of continuity, nor her hesitant and ineffectual compassion, can justify this act of cruel pique. So much for the healing art. By the finale, Updike has packed his rebellious women back into the boring monogamous system - it claims them, as of right.

*The Witches of Eastwick* is, then, toughly argued and provocative - a text for our times, despite the supernatural overlay. For the most part, it is intriguingly organized, and the dialogue is superb throughout, but the narrative prose is well below Updike's standards. The earth in winter is as "hard as iron"; Sukie's face is "bright as a new penny"; a girl's bikini isn't tight as a drum but "taut and simple as a drum"; as Updike fusses with the cliché. Similarly, Jane Smart doesn't just bristle in the old well-worn way: because she is a witch, "her voice bristled like a black cat's fur, idlescent". Another screw splintering the woodwork. Nor do I think the supernatural motif gives this numb platitude: "as if in a crystal ball she saw that she would meet and fall in love with this man...". Updike, too, over-uses a device patented by Saul Bellow, the unpunctuated string of adjectives: "the ruthless jubilant lucid minds"; "melancholy triumphant affectionate feelings". Updike is still a master at evoking domestic debris - a corroded barbecue, a chair-arm shiny with dirt, a store-room full of Wellington boots, rakes and pruning shears. But there are too many sentences in which the subject hangs by its fingernails from a cliff-face, overwhelmed by subordinate clauses, until the main verb at last comes to the rescue.

"Marge Perley, whose horrid canary-yellow hair for Sale signs leaped up and down on trees and fences as on the idea of economics and fashion (Eastwick had for decades been semi-depressed and semi-fashionable) people moved in and out of town, was a heavily made-up, go-getting woman who, if one at all, was a witch on a different wavelength from Jane, Alexandra and Sukie." You begin to see what Eliot meant by the "intolerable wrestle with words and ideas". The terrible thought strikes you that Updike is one of our best writers.

# The wrath to come

D. J. Enright

CHRISTOPHER HOPE  
*Kruger's Alp*  
279pp. Heinemann. £8.95.  
0434 346680

Myth is no longer able to give shape and significance to what Eliot, with *Ulysses* in mind, called "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history". In this line of endeavour we have progressed - or regressed - to harsh fantasy. Christopher Hope's new novel is in some sense a moral history of South Africa, from the simple believing Boers to the sophisticated and opportunistic "New Men", akin to Salman Rushdie's picture of Pakistan in *Shame*, and - behind that - to the Germany of Günter Grass's *Dog Years*, where the refrain "There was once" is the equivalent of Hope's "And I saw in my dream". Varying in their proportions of realism and surrealism, of hilarity and horror, George Konrad's recent novel, *The Loser*, and Josef Skvorecky's forthcoming one, *The Engineer of Human Souls*, do much the same for Hungary and Czechoslovakia respectively. Perhaps this kind of fantasy, an extrapolation from fact, is now the predominant mode of the novel. If so, it is good news for fiction, but bad news in respect of the reality in which we have to live. The world cannot be soberly described or usefully criticized; it can only be choked over.

The framework of *Kruger's Alp* is a pilgrim's progress through a wilderness about to be burned with fire from Heaven, or indeed (the term used is "the Total Onslaught") from all sides, to "that shining city on the hill" which, according to legend, Paul Kruger prepared for "the pure remnants of the volk". This house of many mansions, the story has it, was established with the help of the gold Kruger took with him when fleeing the British in 1900. The hero of Hope's first novel, *A Separate Development*, fell among philosophers: important conclusions were surely to be drawn from the case of a white boy who turned into some sort of kaffir here, ex-Father Blanchaille has fallen among accountants: all that matters now, behind the façade of "the sanctity of separate lavatories", is money - money working wonders, moving in strange directions, being salted away here and there. Christian duty means "get what you can and keep it"; God and Mammon are reconciled, the Dragon of Geneva and the Whore of Rome are in cahoots, and with the Russian Bear as well.

Bunyan's hobgoblins, satyrs and monsters, his worldly Wiseman and Giant Despair, take the shape of itinerant and bemused civil servants, policemen, patriots, rugby players, priests and presidents, of Bantustans and castanets, "subtle easements of policy". Ministers for Parallel Equilibria, Ethnic Autonomy and Cultural Communication, and the bribing of foreign publicists; also a complication far exceeding the Carré of double and treble agents, of secret societies and "family gatherings". This is a world where function is smothered in surmise, and nothing is but what is not. The fantasy, or comic nightmare, or tragic farce, is sustained with gusto, and with surprising propriety of tone. Recruited to lay out the bodies of those killed in a township "for", Blanchaille is told by a police colonel

who expects them to leap up and attack his men, "I'm in charge here and I'll decide who's dead or not." The Straf Kaffir Brigade, we hear, has released syphilitic-infected white mice in the multi-racial casinos newly opened in Bantu homelands. And, since "ours is a holy land", the bulldozers demolishing redundant churches to make room for the huge University of National Christian Education rest on the Sabbath.

Even though he has borrowed Bunyan's allegoric licence, it may be that Hope bears down a little too heavily. The syphilitic mice crop up twice; one almost feels sorry for the temporizing bishop, Blanchford, who contrives to be right - for example in "embracing the suffering Christ" of the transit camps - without being prematurely right; while the inn and onts of cabal and fiddle border on the vertiginous. Truth is often weird (and less measured and elegant) than fiction dare be. Who would swallow the pilgrim's progress of Zola Budd, from running among the ostriches to running across Mary Decker, except for the evidence of television? But Hope's generalizations lend substance to his imaginings: "The capacity to praise today what you executed people for yesterday, and of course vice versa, always vice versa, and with complete sincerity is essential for the maintenance of power." And there are some shrewd remarks about this country, too. "The English are a strange race, obsessed with economics and they seldom bath", says Red Magda, the audacious saboteur for whom Kip-sel suffered torture rather than betray her, and who turns out to have worked for the Regime all along:

When I came the country was governed by a series of pressure groups who went around shrieking at one another about incomprehensible causes. . . . Like an elderly woman with a guilty past they are beset by their desire to confess, on the one hand, and deny it all, on the other. They regret, repent and deplore all they've been, never realizing that it's only their past that makes them worth knowing.

Bunyan was privileged. He had a celestial city for his pilgrims to reach, where "there shall be no more crying, nor sorrow". At the modern author can offer Blanchaille and Kipsel, his Christian and Hopeful, at the end of the road is a shabby spa or geriatric clinic; above Montreux, so overcrowded that meals ("good, if rather heavy") have to be served in several sittings. A last refuge, a neutral place of terminal exile, where the promised crowns are fancy brooches and medallions made from gold coins, and the inmates recount their pathetic and confused stories, perhaps throughout eternity. They - and not the supposed riches - are "Kruger's millions". The final message is a negative one: the belief that a determined people of good will, ingenuity and courage can survive in South Africa is simply a delusion.

Sad it may be, but it must be. In the end secular fantasy falls back into realism, and the writer, his satire achieved, has to settle for some feasible reality. The trek and the incidental encounters and anecdotes matter, not the arrival. As Cavayé observed, Ithaka gave you the marvellous journey, full of adventure, full of discovery, but Ithaka has nothing else to give beyond the journey. When Kipsel protests, "More stories!", the cheroot-smoking matron of *Bad Kruger* says what we take to be the last word: "We all need stories. We owe our lives to stories", she scolds him. "Do not spit on stories, Mr Kipsel, or stories might spit on you."

there a discernible pattern. The monologue is by turns anguished, self-deprecating, wry, with climaxes of hatred - against Austria, against society, against himself. And it has threads of irony and ambiguity - eloquent overkill can, after all, begin to look like dependence.

Bernhard's achievement lies in his making fiction out of what might easily have become a case-history in paranoia and monomania. Bernhard's obsessive test syntax to breaking-point, creating their own labyrinthine rhetoric in a variety of tones of voice. In *Concrete* Bernhard asks his reader - and his translator - to register the varying voices of Rudolf as he fulminates, rambles, repeats himself, contradicts himself. David McLintock has recreated that variety with great skill and fluency. The revealing rush of events at the very end of

## Eloquent overkill

THOMAS BERNHARD  
*Concrete*  
Translated by David McLintock  
154pp. Dent. £8.95.  
0460 046101

Frail in body but blisteringly eloquent, Rudolf, a middle-aged Austrian musicologist, writes in a hotel-room in Palma. He writes not the long, delayed opening to his unwritten book on Melchior Bach but "notes" - notes which form the fragmented but coherent monologue of a man who, if one at all, was a witch on a different wavelength from Jane, Alexandra and Sukie. You begin to see what Eliot meant by the "intolerable wrestle with words and ideas". The terrible thought strikes you that Updike is one of our best writers.

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Wanda M. Corn

ELIZABETH JOHNS  
Thomas Eakins: The heroism of modern life  
207pp. Princeton University Press. £36.  
0691 040222

In the last thirty years of the nineteenth century, when studio photography dominated the portrait field and most creative painters turned to the art of landscape, Thomas Eakins, the great American realist, did not follow the trend. He fashioned his career as a portraitist, painting some 250 portraits in his lifetime. Yet he could hardly be said to have been successful; he was never sought after by the rich, social or powerful. When Gilded Age patrons commissioned portrait paintings, they wanted the flattering, fashionable styles of John Singer Sargent, Anders Zorn or William Merritt Chase - not Eakins's dark and moody busts. Eakins rarely received a commission and his sitters - often acquaintances or family members - posed for him at his request. He kept the finished portraits, selling few of them during his lifetime. This was partly because he had an independent income and did not need to paint for a living; but also because Eakins's contemporaries found his portraiture ugly and unflattering.

Elizabeth Johns's authoritative and elegantly written book takes a new and very independent look at these portraits and all but ignores the biographical approach which has characterized previous Eakins scholarship. Unlike other scholars who depict Eakins as an outsider, radical realist or rebellious teacher, Johns presents a man deeply committed to the best values and achievements of his age. Although she avoids the term, she sees Eakins as eminently Victorian, as a man of high principle and moral purpose. She believes that he had a profound appreciation for hard work, discipline, and self-made men. His sitters - scientists, clergymen, musicians, actresses, educators and athletes - were not just friends and acquaintances but "important representatives of an excellence fostered and rejoiced in by the entire community"; they were modern egalitarian heroes.

The opening chapter is devoted to Eakins's training and intellectual formation. Johns presents him as a very serious, dedicated and disciplined student of art. He grew up in a loving but proper middle-class family and was educated at Pennsylvania's first public high school. It was at school that Eakins absorbed his lifelong values: "a commitment to scientific thinking and a championing of egalitarianism. In the intellectual world of Central High School, the only aristocracy was that learned by disciplined application." After studying with Gérôme in Paris, he returned home in July 1870 to embark on a career which would be distinctively Philadelphian, celebrating the

city's history and "the achievements of its citizens".

Following this brief account of the early years, is a chapter on each of five great Eakins portraits: "Max Schmitt in a Single Scull", "The Gross Clinic", "William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River", "The Concert Singer", and "Walt Whitman." Johns argues that Eakins painted people in the way he did because he wanted to promote a particular constellation of human values. He painted men and women to underline their hard-won achievements and moral excellence. In reaching this conclusion, Johns tells us much about the lives of his sitters, and about the pictorial conventions in which he worked. She



Thomas Eakins's "Music" (1904), reproduced from the book reviewed here.

explores in vivid detail the achievements of Max Schmitt and the history of sculling in the nineteenth century; writing on "The Gross Clinic" she examines Dr Gross's famed contributions to the history of surgery and his professional reputation for moderation and humility. In her study of "The Concert Singer", Johns appeals to the central position of music in late Victorian culture to explain the frequent occurrence of people singing and playing instruments in Eakins's pictures.

By recreating his high esteem for the physical and mental demands of sculling, the clinical and scientific work of the surgeon, and the technical and expressive demands of Victorian music, Johns argues that in late nineteenth-century Philadelphia the sculler, surgeon and musician were modern "heroes"; hence her subtitle.

The problem with such an analysis is that it makes Eakins out to be a paragon of civic virtue, a model citizen, a kind of period saint grasping more profoundly than others, in Johns's words, "the ideals of achievement and morality, and of virtue in the democratic life, that were promulgated in the schools, in public discourse, and in journals and newspapers of every persuasion." While such a view admirably corrects the image of Eakins as the alienated artist listening to his own drummer, it also loses sight of the too serious, defiant, often unhappy Eakins; of the artist in severe conflict with the Pennsylvania Academy; of the man whose interests in human anatomy scandalized his community, and who in old age could not

roster of eminence concentrated on the intellectual, the artist and the athlete.

No body of work defines Eakins's individualism more clearly, it might be argued, than the late portraits, so unpopular at the time. These paintings are uncompromisingly sober, the figures painfully worn and aged. While the early portraits show active and authoritative men and women in complicated settings, often with others in attendance, the late portraits (from the mid-1880s on) show isolated individuals seated or standing in large spaces, lost in their own thoughts. Though one would never label Eakins a symbolist or post-impressionist, he does share with artists such as Van Gogh, Gauguin, Winslow Homer a movement away from naturalist studies towards a more subjective and psychological art. It is not that in the late 1880s and 1890s Eakins gave up his deep-seated devotion to perspective and anatomical facts, but that he decided that this was not enough. He wanted to empathize with the emotional states of his sitters, to feel, in that characteristically modern way, that their plight is our plight, that their fragility is our human condition. The result was a portraiture less involved in describing what one did in life than in presenting man as a psychological and feeling human being.

In her discussion of these late portraits, contained in the chapter devoted to the portrait of Walt Whitman, Johns barely mentions the late nineteenth-century disillusionment with facts and science, the so-called artistic crisis of the 1880s. Her view is wholly original and unexpected: she sees the late portraits as continuing Eakins's obsession with heroic behaviour but argues that his definition of heroism changed. The figures in these portraits are no longer heroes of discipline and excellence, but "heroes of endurance", helpless men and women "subject to the forces of nature beyond their control". Their heroism consists in surviving the wear and tear of daily life.

Documenting contemporary medical theories of nervous exhaustion and stress, Johns makes a case for the artist's awareness of them and his incorporation of this new information in his late portraits, which is to honor Eakins for having found a positive and redeeming way of dealing with the complexities of modern life. This claim is, ultimately, the driving force behind this book. The author believes that Eakins's lifelong search for excellence and quality was exemplary in his own time and can be a model in our own.

Gail Levin's *Edward Hopper as Illustrator*, first published in 1979 by the Whitney Museum, has recently been reissued in paperback (506pp, including 258 colour and 490 black-and-white illustrations. W. W. Norton in association with the Whitney Museum. \$17.00 393 30148 6). Gail Levin's monograph is a prelude to the four-volume Hopper catalogue raisonné.

tolerate modern art. Controversy and failure are so underplayed in this account that we easily forget that if the late nineteenth century was, as Johns would have it, the "Age of Eakins", it was also the Gilded Age with all its corruption, graft and suffocating gentility.

It is hard to make Eakins the central spokesman for his age when he had such an unconventional mind. However much he shared its values, he always expressed them in his own peculiar terms, and as someone obstinately marginal to the mainstream. Eakins did not celebrate, as did other writers and portraitists, the truly public heroes of the day - the industrialists, inventors, philanthropists, bankers, society figures, military leaders and politicians whose names filled the era's newspapers and still dominate the history books. Instead, his

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Cinegraph: Lexikon zum deutschsprachigen Film  
812pp. Munich: Text und Kritik. DM118.  
368371722

This is potentially a useful reference book. I say "potentially", because in its present form it infuriates by reason of the apparent arbitrariness of its inclusions and omissions. It comes in two loose-leaf folders containing filmographies and short biographies of German film-makers from the silent era to the most recent flowering of the German cinema, together with a few critical essays; and what we are offered here is only a first instalment, to be supplemented over the years by further loose leaves which can be inserted in the appropriate place. The first instalment includes Carl Hoffmann but not Eugen Schüfftan, Otto Wernicke but not Rudolf Klein-Rogge, Louise Brooks but not Asta Nielsen, S. Z. Sakall but not Fritz Kortner, Wilhelm Dieterle but not Dietrich Sierck, H. J. Syberberg and Alexander Kluge but not Werner Schroeter or Werner Herzog... and so on, through all the categories of film-making. The reason for making this particular selection is given, in the preface, as a wish to present "a broad cross-section": but this does not make the individual choices any less puzzling.

For obvious reasons there is no consecutive page-numbering. The publishers tell us that this first volume contains 812 pages - potential purchasers should be advised, however, that the method of publishing necessitates a great deal of blank space. The filmographies included are commendably full; one is particularly grateful that in the case of emigrants and immigrants they also list films made in languages other than German and in countries other than Germany, Austria and Switzerland. We can thus gauge the continuity of Wilhelm (or William) Dieterle's work in Berlin and Hollywood, and measure the sad course of Louise Brooks's career, from its Hollywood beginnings to its artistic peak in Germany, through a brief French episode, a decline into Hollywood B and C pictures, and finally to her total disappearance from the large screen. Her comeback as an author, and as an icon for younger film-makers, is also discussed in a compressed but highly readable essay.

There are strange anomalies, even so. Marlene Dietrich rates a photograph; but why are the entries on Louise Brooks, Hans Albers, or Renate Müller not similarly illustrated? Even where we are vouchsafed a photo, the captioning is often inadequate. The picture captioned "Dudow, Berlin, 1955", for instance, shows two men, with no indication which is Slatan Dudow; the picture captioned "Kluge mit Ulrich Klose" again shows two men, and leaves the reader to guess who is who. Another anomaly concerns the amount and kind of information provided by individual filmographies. Take two important actresses of the German screen who made a roughly comparable number of films. In the case of Louise Brooks the entries tell us, in bold type, when a certain film was made, its various titles, who directed it, who took the leading parts (with Louise Brooks's own name in bold type), which film company produced the film, and the exact date and place at which it was first shown. In the case of Sybille Schmitz (the unforgettable star of Dreyer's *Vampyr* and Frank Wisbar's *Fährmann Maria*), all we are given is the date of release, the title, and the name of the director - and bold type is not used at all. In neither case is the cameraman mentioned or (where applicable) the composer of film-music. In this last department the first instalment is particularly weak; Marlene Dietrich's films are listed without a single mention of Friedrich Holländer. Needless to say, Holländer has not been given an entry of his own in the "broad cross-section" of this initial instalment.

The biographical and critical entries are by various hands and range from the excellent to the inadequate. The essay on Thea von Harbou belongs firmly in the first of these categories. It acutely relates her (dreadful) novels to the film-scripts she provided for many of Germany's most prestigious film-directors, and

shows how these scripts married kitsch elements with a real feeling for what was going on, intricately, in the minds of the generations that produced and sustained Hitler. At the other end of the scale is the entry on Gustaf Gründgens. Here we are told that on film he was effective only in supporting roles - in utter disregard of his wonderful Mephisto (in the widely seen and rightly admired film version of his stage production) or his classic assumption of the role of Professor Higgins in the German film version of Shaw's *Pygmalion* with Jenny Jugo. Nor does this entry see fit to mention that Gründgens's career formed the basis of a much-discussed novel by Klaus Mann, on which a justly famous stage production and a splendid film have recently been based. Such information is not barred on principle - for several of the entries do take account of films more or less loosely based on the lives of film-actors. The note on Renate Müller, for instance, mentions Artur Brauner's production *Liebling der Götter*, in which Ruth Leuwert's role was inspired by Müller's brief career.

The different contributors to the discursive sections of this *Lexikon* also show very variable talents in selecting the detail necessary to evoke appropriate recognition in those who have no immediate image of the actor concerned. The entry on S. Z. Sakall, for instance,

brings back his podgy charm perfectly and even describes how he used to strike his wobbly cheeks with both hands in moments of surprise or delight. The entry on Curt Bois, on the other hand, gives us no such visual clue, and does not even tell us of the German equivalent of "scat" singing which was the hallmark of so many of his cabaret performances. Here a photograph would have helped, or a reference to one or more of Bois's distinctive gramophone recordings. This essay does tell us, however, usefully, that a clip of Bois's humorous transvestite appearance in an early film was used by the Nazis as anti-semitic propaganda, while the entry on Peter Lorre fails to tell us that clips of his performance in Fritz Lang's *M* were used in the same way and even in the same propaganda film.

Inevitably, some of the aesthetic verdicts advanced will be open to challenge - in the intelligent and well-informed essay on H. J. Syberberg, for instance, *Hitler: Ein Film aus Deutschland* has been taken too much at the author-director's own valuation. There can be no doubt, however, that browsers in this first instalment will glean much interesting detail about a number of careers that are not well covered in other reference books. A spot-check, made with the inadequate means at my disposal, strongly suggests that the list of films

directed, or acted in, or photographed, or produced by those included here is as accurate as conscientious research and computer technology can make it. It will be a long time, however, before this German *Lexikon* builds up into anything as comprehensive and as consistently useful, as lovers of the English and American cinema have long enjoyed in Leslie Halliwell's modestly priced, frequently updated, and wholly indispensable *Film Guide* and *Films of the Companion*.

*Fassbinder: Film maker* by Ronald Hayman (164pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £10.95, paperback £5.95. 2 97 78447 1) has recently been published. Hayman concludes his copiously illustrated biography: "He was so successful in creating a Fassbinder legend that it forms the perspective in which we view the film, and the legend was a major part of his achievement. The statements he made about himself and the statements that are contained in anecdotes about him become inseparable from the statements made in the films. He understood that their reception would depend partly on his image, and one reason for behaving outrageously was that outrage would promote them. He needed the legend, and he sacrificed himself to it." The book includes a filmography and a select bibliography.

Collins

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## COMMENTARY

## In the light of circumstantial evidence

John Nash

The Age of Vermeer and de Hooch: Masterpieces of Seventeenth Century Dutch Genre Painting Royal Academy, until November 18

This exemplary exhibition is most opportune. In the past twenty-five years art historians have argued that beneath the apparent realism of seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting lies a concealed symbolism. Last year, in her widely publicized *The Art of Describing*, Svetlana Alpers set out to argue that "northern images do not disguise meaning or hide it beneath the surface but rather show that meaning by its very nature is lodged in what the eye can take in . . .". The 111 paintings shown at the Royal Academy are a very judicious sampling of the diversity of images produced in the Dutch Republic in the first years of its independence, and the excellent catalogue provides a balanced introduction to the current state of scholarship, including Alpers's position. We are, for once, enabled to judge for ourselves: and we quickly discover that these images do require the spectator to develop the art of attending.

In the first gallery is the largest canvas in the exhibition, by Gerrit van Honthorst, one of three Utrecht painters who studied in Rome around 1610. "The Concert" shows two dandies in plumed hats and Italian silks, one playing the cello as the other sings a duet with a young woman who caresses his neck; behind the singers an older woman enters, holding up a finger signalling secrecy. It is a sumptuous image, appealing to the senses: there are no flowers to please the nose, but there are fruit and wine for the tongue, music for the ear and the young woman's caress may represent touch. Sight, of course, is lavishly appealed to, and attention rewarded by the glimpse, within dark shadow, that the old woman is stealthily picking the dandy's pocket. The sight of this gives a new significance to the younger woman's gesture, as her fondling fingers slide towards the man's jewelled earring. We recognize that here is the Prodigal Son wasting his inheritance: within his present folly lie concealed the seeds of his downfall.

This grandiose canvas of half-length, life-size figures in the manner of Caravaggio looks exotic here: clearly it did not attract the market. On the other wall of this first gallery are the small cabinet pictures, painted with the minute rendering of surface textures and complex detail for which Meibelman had condemned Northern art in the previous century, that did establish the Northern style. But these Merry Companies (as they were identified in contemporary inventories) show the gilded youth of Haarlem, Amsterdam or Delft as contemporary Prodigals.

And here again, our attention is demanded. In the "Merry Company" by Willem Buytewech, three overdressed young men and a young woman are surrounded by the instruments and utensils of pleasure: an empty glass overturned on the floor reveals they have already drunk – but the most extreme indication of their state, the hand of one young man on the girl's belly, is almost completely concealed (appropriately) behind a metal dish of live coals. And in Jacob Duck's "Cardplayers and Merry-makers", where another company of overdressed young men and women make music, smoke, drink and play games of chance, pursuits traditionally associated both with the Children of Venus and the Sin of Luxuria – we may glimpse the small hand-mirror that one woman holds behind a man's cardplayer's head so that his female opponent can read his hand.

Willem Duytster's "Soldiers Beside a Fireplace" is doubly obscure today. It is a firelight scene, reminiscent of the traditional rendering of the Month of February, and a virtuosic treatment of complex chiaroscuro with a candle, a bowl of glowing coals and the finger of a man lighting his pipe to augment the blaze in the hearth. Two men tranquilly play cards on the right, but, of the four round the hearth, why does one, the most sharply illuminated, stare and roll his eye? Peer closely and you will see he is spying the almost invisible jug held by the boy beside him in the shadow, and note, too,

there is not a glass in sight. What does it mean? The catalogue does not even mention the jug. Yet this figure as, despite his crossed ankles, he begins to rise from his seat, is dramatic. Surely the artist expected his audience to see its significance.

On the whole, these pictures obscure their meanings quite literally: they are seldom recondite or ambiguous, though the painters of the second half of the century turn away from scenes of manifest profligacy to images of apparent order within which temptation is a dangerous leaven.



"Woman at a Window", 1654, by Jacobus Vrel, from the exhibition reviewed here.

This is the case with Emanuel de Witte's "Interior with a Woman at a Clavichord". Within a calm perspective through the open doors of a suite of three rooms in which sunlight dapples the black and white floor tiles with a counterpoint of light and shade, we see the back of a heavily robed woman playing the clavichord beneath a large mirror. On looking more closely into the picture, we make out within the shadows of the curtained bed on the left, the face of a man. Is the woman playing to minister to his sickness or stir his passions? There is no ambiguity of that kind here. The clothes on the chair beside the bed include a hat and a sword, the costume of a gallant. Beneath that chair, in the bottom left corner of the painting, where such keys are regularly placed, are the shoes with which modesty was proverbially cast off. Then there is the fateful wine-jug on the table behind the woman and, curled on a mat by the bed, the familiar dog. With this evidence, so circumstantial, so traditional, the broom in the hands of the servant in

## Distasteful metamorphoses

Patricia Craig

The Company of Wolves  
Odeon, Leicester Square

In "The Company of Wolves" (included in *The Bloody Chamber*, 1979) Angela Carter reduces the short story to its bare bones and then caresses them to set up a fearsome rattle like the bones of the old grandmother under the bed. It's hard to think of anything starker or more subtly atmospheric than this story, and sad to see these qualities vanish so completely in the author's own adaptation for the screen. Everything seems to augur well for this film: Niall Jordan as director, Angela Carter taking a hand in the production, satisfactory casting and excellent photography. But it doesn't work. A deforming lushness and richness take it over, resulting in an excess of Gothic props on the one hand, and a fair amount of prettification on the other. For example: instead of the perpetual northern coldness that envelops the story, we get episodes of rustic jolliness in a setting that doesn't seem too far in spirit from Sherwood Forest.

Of course, there are problems involved in turning an eleven-page story into a film of

the farthest room becomes that with which the prodigal will be swept out once his resources are spent.

Ambiguity does seem to preside in the works of Gerard ter Borch. The most notorious example is, of course, the work from Berlin called since the eighteenth century "The Parental Admonition", but widely accepted now as a traditional procuress scene. There can be little doubt that the cast is appropriately identified as Procureur, Gallant and Whore, rather than Mother, Father and Daughter. But uncertainty prevails, in part because the stereotype of the Prodigal ensnared by the scheming woman is disrupted. Here, as in the Louvre "Soldier Offering a Young Woman Coins", the woman, not the man looks to be the victim (even in the "Woman Drinking Wine with a Sleeping Soldier" the girl appears a victim of her folly rather than the agent of the man's fall). And even more to the point here, the Whore's face is concealed and we can only surmise her response to the Gallant's proposition.

This dramatic subtlety calls to mind the observation made by Christopher Brown in his new book on Dutch genre painting, *Scenes of Everyday Life*, that one of the few contemporary areas to discuss such paintings, Gerard de Laire, wrote in *Het Groot Schilderboek* of 1707 that a painter of modern life might represent two women taking tea, one offering and the other refusing, as a domestic drama in which "these two passions cause two contrary motions in the whole body, hands, feet and face". The advice might have been drawn directly from Vasari, and serves as a reminder that ter Borch was almost unique among his peers in having spent time in Italy.

The attention demanded by Vermeer is total – and it is deplorable that the four Vermeers here are displayed as if their presence were sufficient, whether visible or not. The Queen's picture is almost impossible to see properly, being enclosed in a highly reflective "vitrina" and coated with a glassy varnish that emphasizes the fine crackle of the surface. From the familiar props this "Music Lesson" is another representation of the power of love or sexual infatuation. Yet to recognize that is to have seen very little.

The more we contemplate its precisely ordered harmonies of light and form, its crystalline lucidity, the more we must come to recognize that the subtlety of its facture makes even ter Borch's refined definition look mechanical. But, as we continue to look we also discover that such absolute order, so immutable an image of an instant – in which her reflection appears to anticipate the woman's turning to the man, and yet in which neither can move – appears as a metaphor for their mutual freedom by desire.

reasonable length. At some point, the decision was taken to present the events of the narrative as someone's dream, complete with slow motion shots of interpretable aberrations. The younger daughter in a modern family is experiencing the onset of adolescence, which makes her thresh about a good deal in her tasteful attic bed. First we see Rosaleen, as she is called (Sarah Patterson), in the bed; and then we see the dream supervening, as things become profusely surreal. Her sister Alice (Georgia Slowa) quickly makes an exit from the story, pursued by a lot of wolves, and meets her end with due regard for the conventions of cinematic horror.

Next, Rosaleen and her parents are translated to a medieval village, and grandmother – played by Angela Lansbury as a cheerfully crotchety old body with a talent for story-telling – puts in an appearance. Interspersed with the main narrative are a number of grandmother's lycanthropic tales. A bridegroom (Stephen Rae) abandons his wife for the company of wolves, reappears some years later and proceeds to undergo a very distasteful metamorphosis in front of our eyes. It involves stripping off layers of skin to get down to the wolfishness underneath. As far as chilling the blood is concerned, this scene is no more

That Vermeer entertained the highest ambition for his art and demanded our minutes made by Ivan Gaskell in the current *Burlington Magazine* that the "Woman Holding a Balance" from Washington is not an example of Averara, indifferent to Christ's Judgment represented behind her. As Arthur Wheelock earlier noticed, the scale-pans are empty. She represents Truth, who, as the Italian Cesare Ripa prescribed in his *Iconologia*, was equipped with mirror and balance – for Truth, like a balance, is made equally of things as they are and as they are perceived.

If the climax of this exhibition is the work of Vermeer, its centre is occupied by the eight sprawling inextinguishable paintings of Jan Steen. And if Vermeer was parsimonious with his talent and ambitious for his art, Steen was an artistic profligate, dissipating his vast energies in a welter of images teeming with incident and detail in which every detail is significant. "The Dissolute Household" from the Wellington Museum has its title chalked on the tallyboard on the floor, with retribution overhead in a basketful of birch-rods, a sword, a crutch, a rapier's clapper and other instruments, and between them dissolution is exemplified in a proliferation of images, literal, as the child picks his drunken mother's purse, or metaphorical, as the Gallant rests his leg across the Whore's lap. Steen spells out his story with inscriptions, pictures on the wall, proverbial imagery, socially familiar actions and rituals, properties, costumes, gestures and expressions. He requires of his audience a discerning attention to symbols and symptoms that would have delighted Sherlock Holmes and which only Hogarth in the following century could match. (And what a splendid commemoration of the tercentenary of Prince William's snail in England in 1688 a Steen/Hogarth exhibition would be.)

But in the finest Steen here, the "Prayer Before the Meal" from Sudely Castle, like the pious attitudes of the peasant family, the memento mori still-life of extinguished candle, Bible and skull, or the inscribed prayer that establishes the air of tranquillity that is so at odds with Steen's other works: it is a rendering of evening light falling across the surfaces of the world that blesses them and answers the prayer. It is a startling work in which Steen for once appears to offer hope of salvation to fallen man.

Only Dou and his pupils appear to have embarked on a deliberately cryptic symbolism, full of *double-entendres* rendered in a microscopical technique as laboured as the imagery. For the rest, this was an art that saw new examples of old themes perennially recurrent and gave the daily round significance by a moral taxonomy.

effective than the inside of a butcher's shop. In another lavish interlude, a company of wedding guests is transformed into a pack of wolves; we watch, with more than a little detachment, as claws burst through one pair after another of black patent pumps. Finally, we get to the crux of the fable, as the girl in her red cloak – "as pretty as she was edible", as Thunder said of a silly sheep – sets out through the wood.

In Angela Carter's ruthless retellings of selected fairy tales the aim is to make explicit certain facets of the traditional stories, while retaining a decorative and allegorical framework, and also to emphasize the barbaric efficacy. There's a marvellous moment in "Wolves" when, in response to the ritual phrase "All the better to eat you with", the girl bursts out laughing. "She knew she was nobody's meat". This particular exchange is missing from the screen adaptation, along with the hairlines and high erotic charge which underlie Carter's prose. Things are considerably more elaborate and euphemistic in the film, not to say overwrought. Wolves invade the attic bedroom (sailing gracefully through an oil painting in a further series of slow-motion shots), just in case we missed the point of what it was about. Thunder put it more succinctly: "The Beast in Me".

## Cursing the absent God

John Weightman

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE  
The Devil and the Good Lord  
Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith

On paper, *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu* has always struck me as a great bit irritating nonsense, quite unworthy of the author who, some fifteen years before, had expressed all the Absurdist-Existentialist subtleties of *La Nausée*. It is a sort of latterday Romantic drama – Sartre eventually admitted to a fondness for that nineteenth-century form – which seems to roll together Hugo's *Hernani*, Musset's *Lorenzaccio* and the Moses of Vigny's poem, *Moïse*, to create the nucleus of Goetz, a megalomaniacal hero who rages against God, Man and Himself (the capital is essential) during three long acts, comprising forty-two scenes. Although loosely based on Goetz von Berlichingen, the early-sixteenth-century German soldier of fortune, the character is obviously meant to embody a modern world-view, since the many anachronisms, the frequent *mots d'auteur* and the up-to-date language show that the play is not, in any

serious sense, a historical drama. Besides, it belongs to Sartre's "committed" period (1951), and it sounds like a non-believer's riposte to *Le Soldat de saïu*, Claudel's intensely Catholic play, staged not long before by Jean-Louis Barrault.

But what is the message? Goetz, a gifted general involved in the religious and social wars, begins, as a Bastard Outsider, by trying to achieve perfection in evil so as to get his own back on God and society. Then, evil having become monotonous, on a whim he switches to "doing good"; that is, he gives away his ill-gotten lands to the peasants, and urges them to create a City of the Sun, founded on mutual love. The project naturally fails, because the peasants cannot adjust overnight and, in any case, are slaughtered like lambs by their jealous neighbours. Whereupon, Goetz retreats to the wilderness to scourge his body in the style of a Desert Father, except that – this being, after all, theatre – an adoring young female accompanies him and saves him from self-immolation. However, in the vacuum, he eventually discovers, O miracle, that God doesn't exist. Meanwhile, the peasants are losing the fight against their oppressors, and their

## Finger-clicking good

Peter Kemp

Bookmark  
BBC2

BBC 2's refurbished *Bookmark* opens with a sequence interleaved with glimpses of text and manuscript. Crisply, this displays its distance from the last season's cash-obsessed series where balance sheets were more likely to be scrutinized. Writing, not marketing or random reader-response, is now the prime focus. Instead of the guests and gimmicks, the new producer Timothy Gardam follows his successful *Times* formula in giving over each programme to three films. Instead of the earlier emollient, fan Hamilton, a shrewd choice as new presenter, brings a brisk purposefulness.

For all this, the programme started shakily, with an impoverished item on Martin Amis's *Money* (to be reviewed in the *TLS* next week). With uncharacteristic hyperbole, Hamilton hailed the novel as "one of the key books of the decade" – a bulging claim never convincingly filled out either by his commentary on the novel or by dramatized extracts from it. Suggestions that the book offered something excitingly fresh consorted oddly with the news that it set in a "self-destructive hell" – the routine Amis ambience – and that its hero (like his septuagenarian predecessors in Amis's other novels) "aches with a dismayed, if not repelled, self-centredness".

Novelty did surface in the interview where bizarre claims – "People don't behave for intelligible reasons any more" – were backed up by unusual explications: "motivation . . . just hasn't got what it takes any more to motivate". His book, Amis insisted, furnishes "a new twentieth-century view" – consisting, apparently, of the perception that nowadays people without cultural roots chase materialistic satisfactions across a landscape ravaged by "waste and fatigue". It was bad luck that his attempt to advertise this as a pioneering insight occurred on a programme also containing a feature on *The Waste Land*. But, for all his finger-clicking verbal style – "I can't make happiness really live on the page" – Amis's stance often seemed lame. In the interview, as in his work, souped-up demotic collided with pedestrian concepts. Hamilton spoke of "the clichés the book brings to life". But this banality-resuscitation was never seen operating. There was merely the sense of someone striving to invest platitudes with punchiness.

The next film attempted to establish why Agatha Christie is the most widely-read of red-herring purveyors. Its initial mapping of her fictional world – "Inhabited by the prosperous and the middle classes", confined to "country houses, drawing rooms and libraries", set in a "fantasy Edwardian" era – was misleadingly cramped. In actuality, her setting range from Bath to the Caribbean; her characters, from the upper

London dental surgery. One book travels as far back as Ancient Egypt; the others, advancing over the years from the 1930s to the 1960s, cover – with psychological simplicity but some sociological sharpness – a quite wide span of classes and types.

Later contributions were more considered, especially those of Robert Barnard who saw Christie's main concern as "conjuring and bringing off tricks". Central to her success, he underlined, is the use of legerdemain. Her most famous fictional sleight-of-hand – the homicidal narrator of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* – was referred to several times. Other instances might have been mustered: in one book, it's an investigating policeman who's the murderer; in two others, a supposed corpse. And her plots, it could have been added, show another aspect of her taste for playing puzzlingly with patters: a high proportion of them – *Five Little Pigs*, *Ten Little Niggers*, *One, Two, Buckle My Shoe*, *The Labours of Hercules* and so on – take nursery rhymes or myths as frameworks for their gruesome guessing-games.

After the Christie film, aptly enough, came a first-rate exercise in literary detection. Stemming from Peter Ackroyd's new biography, this film investigated a year in T. S. Eliot's life – 1921, when he was working on *The Waste Land*. His personal life was ransacked for clues as to motive: evidence of stress with his family and his wife tellingly accumulated. Journeys during the year – regular ones to Lloyds via London Bridge, a recuperative trip to Margate – were shown to have left prints on the poem. Literary allusions, at first slight drawn from a broad range of sources, got tracked down to the narrower space of contemporary review columns. A particularly interesting find suggested that it wasn't only the emotional and intellectual climate of the year that influenced the poem. 1921, it transpired, was freakishly hot and dry: temperatures of 92°F in February and "an uncanny 145°F" in July (causing a mirage in The Mall and fires across the countryside). This cast a new light on the poem's more parched passages (evocatively read by Helen Gardner who – doing the piece – in different voices – also gave a splendid comic Cockney rendering of the pub scene). The film unearthed bit-of-brace – like the mandoline his wife bought Eliot – subsequently worked into *The Waste Land*. And it illustrated some of its scenes: St. Magnus Martyr's "inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold" transferred handsomely to the screen – though the clock of St Mary Woolnoth, conscientiously filmed at nine, doesn't show days; it seems, keep the hours with any strokes, dead-sounding or otherwise. Always, too, the film kept the text prominently in view, often usefully concentrating a camera on it during readings. Though provoking as well as fact-finding, this production brought the new *Bookmark*'s first

## COMMENTARY

leader, who has argued at various points with Goetz, comes again to ask him to put his military skill at the service of the people. This time Goetz agrees since, God being dead, he wants to be "a man among men". He announces that he will rule the rabble with terror for their own good, and he inaugurates his new commanding role by slaughtering the first individual who objects.

Three things, especially, puzzle me in this farago. Why should a modern symbolic hero take such an unconscionable time to discover that God doesn't exist, when most contemporary thinking, even within the Churches, starts from the premise that God is silent, and so, in effect, leaves man to his own devices? Why should a supposedly intelligent hero imagine that "doing good" must necessarily engender good, when it is proverbial that Hell is paved with good intentions? Are we supposed to sympathize, at the end, with Goetz/Sinlin, the ruthless leader?

John Dexter's production, the first ever in England, has, I think, helped me to see the light. The play is not really one *pièce à thèse*, nor is it even a drama of ideas. It springs from Sartre's non-intellectual core, where he remains intensely religious in a negative way. In this mood, he is not a non-believer but an atheist, for whom the so-called "death of God" is actually a disaster in disguise, because it removes the Divinity as the conveniently hateable creator of the individual consciousness, with its disgust at the mind/body relationship and its horror at the mess of the world. Here, as in some other contexts, Sartre is so exasperated by the silence of God, whether present or absent, that he moves into a kind of dementia state where he loses all sense of intellectual responsibility, bandies ideas about any old how for immediate, grotesque effect, has no patience at all with democratic humanism, and indulges in an imperial dream of cruel omnipotence, echoing the omnipotence of God.

The production does its best to clarify the three-cornered arguments between the working-class leader Hasty (Nasty, in the original, but rebaptized for obvious reasons in Frank Hauser's translation), Heinrich, the priest with a social conscience, and the great Goetz, but they never amount to much, either intellectually or politically, and often degenerate into meaningless farce. Stephen Boxer and Simon Ward have almost as ungrateful a task as the two women, Catherine (Veronica Duffy) and Hilda (Maia Simon), who are only in the play to worship the central character: Hilda, incidentally, does so with a strong French accent, which brings an unexpected Saint-Germain-des-Près flavour to her scenes. The crowd of yokels is beautifully drilled, and rushes in and out in the best essence-of-yokel manner. But all this excellently performed, yet fundamentally reamslack, substructure, studded with old theatrical tricks, only exists as a setting for the hero, Goetz, who, again and again during the four hours, looks up to the gods to address God, and does so once more right at the end, with a wicked smirk.

The revelation of the evening is Gerurd Murphy's performance, and I suppose I must be underestimating the play, since it allows him to give such a magnificent demonstration of histrionic ability. He begins, perhaps, rather too carelessly, with some imitative mouthing of the words in the manner of the late Sir Ralph, but he soon gets into his stride and then carries the action along on a stream of energy, fully equal to the doom in the atheistic Sartre. Not only does he ring the changes, with marvellous aplomb, on defiance, specious intellectualism, charm, imperiousness, false humility and self-disgust; through all the puerile, metaphysical posturing, he also manages to make Goetz credible and almost likeable. I still cannot believe that the play is great, but it seems likely that the English stage has a new great actor.

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# Out from the enclosure

Jeremy Adler

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206pp. Anvil Press. £10 (paperback, £5.95).  
085646 1172

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71pp. Anvil Press. £3.95.  
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GÜNTER KUNERT  
Windy Times  
Translated by Agnes Stein  
227pp. New York: Red Dust Inc.  
P.O. Box 630, New York, N.Y. 10028.  
\$14.95  
087376 0425

Can there be such a thing as East German poetry? Enclosure in the new East has, of course, produced both propaganda and protest poetry; it has also fostered an "arbeitende Subjektivität", a "working subjectivity" or inwardness that yet involves itself dialectically with society and the natural world. Poems in this mode are often dense and concrete without being obscure. And more readily than in the West, they may exploit the poetical complexities of Klopstock and Hölderlin, albeit somewhat simplified by the bluntness of Benn and Brecht. In fact, and whichever side of the Wall you stand, the political division is also a poetic reality.

Johannes Bobrowski, who died in 1965 at the age of forty-eight, is the most distinctive poet to have emerged from East Germany. His haunting, mysterious oeuvre abounds with paradox, it is both monolithic and intimate; concrete, yet seemingly impalpable; consciously post-war, yet timeless. Thanks to the fine translations of Ruth and Matthew Mead, Bobrowski's reputation in England is secure. Their new volume contains 152 poems, that is all but twenty-four of those which Bobrowski himself prepared for publication in book form. It thus replaces both *Shadow Land* (reviewed in the TLS, May 12, 1966), later published in Penguin as *Selected Poems* (1971) and *From the Rivers* (1975). The Meads include all their ninety-six previous translations together with fifty-six new ones, making this a very substantial volume.

The additional poems are essential reading.

since Bobrowski seems to have conceived his work in terms of an overall plan, a "Gesamtplan". There are poems of childhood and of love, pictures of churches, of villages, and of lanes, of plains and rivers, of animals and mythical enactments. Scenes spring to frozen life with photographic exactitude:

The stretch of wall.  
Tower. The slope of the bank. Once  
the wooden bridge broke Tartar fires moved  
through the plains. Night came talking,  
a wandering friar with a straggly  
beard.

Titles like "Village Church 1942" reinforce the pictorial, documentary quality.

There is also a gallery of portraits. Something of the "plan" emerges in their subjects: the poet's own great-great-uncle, Joseph Conrad; German literary predecessors like Hamann (of whom he planned a biography), and his "master", Klopstock; three German Jewish poets; the foreign ancestors Villon, Góngora and Dylan Thomas; Bach and Mozart; Jawlensky and Chagall. The list is a profession of love. It evokes the peculiar cultural symbiosis of Bobrowski's spiritual landscape, which comprises a mixture of German, Jewish, Polish, Lithuanian and Russian. In poems not included here, it can be seen to stretch back to Sappho and Pindar: for it is from their odes, and from Pindar's relation of myth to history, that Bobrowski's work ultimately derives.

Indeed, myth predominates as Bobrowski bends every theme into visionary lament. The landscape becomes a person; people change into land. The poet is in mythical kinship with them all.

In the great stillness  
I come to you  
beautiful brother of woods and hills,  
my river.

Reaching back towards prehistory, "The Sarmatian Plain" is the land whose "soul" Bobrowski can hear "sing". East of the Carpathians, in Roman times Sarmatia stretched north of the Black Sea, between Germania and Scythia. In the new "Sarmatia", time becomes song. Here, where "the Corsican, a southern emperor" passed on "The Road of Armies", "the hungry wolves" still "dragged nights of marsh-haze after him". Here also, "Orpheus walked".

Bobrowski creates a landscape of guilt and conscience. In the great "Pruzzian Elegy", he remembers the heathen people who inhabited Sarmatia until they were "stamped out" by the Teutonic Knights in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: people who live on in "names" and "the rustle of lizards", a symbol of all peoples whom man has thus terribly destroyed.

The Meads are sensitive to Bobrowski's idiom, and try to make just the right changes to accommodate him to English. But there are casualties, notably among the poetic inversions, more of which might have been preserved. Nuances are lost: Bach's *ottentimlich* house is not "ancient" but "antique" or "antiquated", since the dwelling meant is the old-fashioned style of his art. Mistakes occur: for example, *morgen* is treated as *inorgens*, becoming (implausibly) "in the morning" instead of "tomorrow". However, the overall effect of the translations is superb: they deserve to be read as English originals.

Bobrowski's junior by three years, Heinz Winfried Sabais had a very different career. He fled to West Berlin in 1950, settling in Darmstadt. At a time when his literary colleagues were busy peeling the public world left, right, and centre, he actively entered politics as a moderate social democrat, and became Mayor of Darmstadt in 1971. The relation of public and private, personal and political gains a particular urgency in his work.

Sixteen of the poems included here first appeared in *Generation and other Poems* (1968), when Sabais's best work was still to come. "Agenda" (1970) finds him meditating on his career: "Goethe said to be a writer is no profession". He anticipates his own success in others: "Maz Frisch ought to have been / a Mayor". We catch glimpses of his privacy as he reads "aphorisms between two / conferences". We witness his political life: "To advance, millimetre by millimetre". And also we are led to his beliefs: "Ideology is just show-business". In "Socialist Elegy" of 1975, Sabais finally

integrated his experiences. He starts with classical Marxist line: "We, born in back-street slums . . .". This gives way to both history and inwardness: "off into the / woods, grey-green get away". Experience finally reverses the initial stance: "Stalin in Marx / like the doll inside the doll".

Your Majakovskys praise  
murder - with suicide  
already in their skulls.

Sabais's best work (slightly under-represented here) is the sequence *Self or Sacrifice*, written under the impact of his approaching death from cancer in 1971. "The shadow strikes deep": calmly, he surveys his life.

I write the birches, the house  
and the river, this place was mine.  
Here as a child  
I planted my lilac bushes.  
Grandmother prayed out loud  
as grandfather lifted me  
laughing on to the horse: My little  
blonde Tartar, he shouted.  
The house burned but  
the lilac blooms. For passers-by.

Once again, the Meads have translated poetry into genuine poetry.

Günter Kunert is one of the most prolific and best known poets to have emerged from the East. But he, too, came West in 1981, to be a "citizen between two camps". *Windy Times* prints almost 100 poems in parallel text. The selection spans the four volumes published from *Warming vor Spiegel* of 1970 (consistently mis-spelt here) to *Abdrückverfälschung* of 1980. Rather than show Kunert's development, Agnes Stein has, I think rightly, concentrated on some of the best poems, and those which might mean most to an English-speaking reader: today, focusing attention by putting them into three groups named after individual poems: "Foreign Body", "Windy Times", and "In the Poem's Net". She rounds out the picture by including eight prose pieces and twelve of Kunert's own sad and acerbic graphics.

Kunert has been a seismograph for the moods of the intellectual left. Even in the early 1960s, he could still write of the "little and working the machines and of Karl Marx, / and there in the fearful, fruitful chaos of earthly / order". He could "sing of hope", but this vein does not appear in *Windy Times*, where we mainly encounter the bleak pessimism and bitterness which now typify Kunert's pose. False hopes have given way to corresponding despair.

There is no mistaking the drift of Kunert's laconic, epigrammatic style: "Utopia" is the place "which no one has reached alive"; if the trees did not have roots "they would run away"; and the present turns out to be another "thirty years of war". Politics apart, the poems on poetry reveal Kunert at his best. "A Poetics".

The true poem  
extinguishes itself  
at the end  
like a candle so suddenly  
but what it had lit burns  
within the abrupt darkness  
of the retina.

"Within" is wrong: Kunert really means to burn into the retina.

Agnes Stein has put together an impressive collection and translates with gusto. But there are many inaccuracies. She misses obvious allusions: "Hob" is not recognized as "Job", and even the beginning of St John's Gospel passes unnoticed. Some howlers are so awful they might be intentional: "frozen" is not "front", but to "slave or drudge"; "Holen" are not "hollows", but caves. However, there are many happy choices ("geb' es zu" neatly becomes "things happen"), and the poems come over well. Even across the wall of language, we can recognize essentially the same culture stretching from Bobrowski's "Always to be named" to Kunert's "Now everything is named . . . there is nothing left / to describe".

The third issue of *Bolei* (80pp., ISSN 0176-2893, £3), a poetry and translation periodical, includes the previously unpublished correspondence between Samuel Beckett and Ernst Frazer on the translation of *Molloy*, translations into English of poems by Pejer Huchel, Hölderlin, Mallarmé and Rimbaud, into German of poems by Frances Horowitz and Hilda Belloc. *Bolei* is edited by Kevin Parnham, Postfach 31, D-8913 Schondorf, West Germany.

# Heading for the abyss

Daniel Johnson

EBERHARD SPANGENBERG  
Karlreines Romans: Mephisto, Klaus  
Mann und Gustav Gründgens  
240pp. Munich: Ellermann.  
3770701850  
KLAUS MANN  
Mephisto  
Translated by Robin Smyth  
263pp. Penguin. Paperback, £2.50.  
01400 65784

It is to be hoped that Eberhard Spangenberg's book about the grotesque personal, ideological and legal wrangles that have surrounded Klaus Mann's *Mephisto* ever since 1936 will now lay to rest the ghosts of the principals; but it is more likely to rake up the ashes yet again. Certainly Spangenberg has worked hard to assemble every possible article, photograph or letter with a bearing on the history of the novel, and most of this material is reprinted in his book, which consequently is a pleasure to look through. But his pathetic narrative of this litigation, as though it had been a crusade against the hypocrisy and self-repression of the Federal Republic, only made me wonder whether the villain, Gustav Gründgens, might not have had a case after all. Spangenberg's father Berthold, Klaus Mann's publisher since his death, must have sold more copies of all Klaus Mann's works than he would ever have done without the *Mephisto* case and the publicity it received. Is Eberhard Spangenberg, moreover, entitled to take such a high moral tone given that he, born in 1952, cannot say how he would have behaved in 1933? He is not above prying a large and attractive photograph of the writer Joseph Roth's mistress, the splendidly named Andrea Manga Bell, on the strength of an unquoted remark in a letter by Erika Mann about the similarity between this lady and the prostitute In *Mephisto*, Princess

Tebsb. If Miss Bell really were similar to the Princess, she would not have minded the identification; but otherwise Spangenberg has done her, Roth and Klaus Mann a disservice, to bolster a book that boasts few discoveries.

Nevertheless, the chapters which describe the origins of the novel serve to justify the new Penguin translation, in the wake of Szabo's recent film. Whereas the film is about the predicament of the new Hungarian gilded youth, the book bears the authentic stamp of a generation to whom exile came too soon, and who returned from it too late. Many older and more distinguished men, like Heinrich Mann, the uncle of Klaus, suffered bitterly from the fact that their celebrity was no more mobile than their possessions; not so Klaus. He was a fine journalist, and he seized the chance to give a lead to the émigrés with his Amsterdam journal, *Die Sammlung*, and his American one, *Decision*; he was a war correspondent in Italy and wrote his autobiography, *The Turning Point*, and his important study of Gide in English. Though the new translation of *Mephisto* by Robin Smyth is very readable, Klaus Mann would have made a better job of it himself; Smyth attempts to improve upon the German, but Mann's English prose was good enough to have produced an accurate rendering.

In spite of this adaptability, Klaus Mann considered himself a failure. By 1945 the society that he had been destined to inherit and to interpret had been effaced. His father, Thomas, was sufficiently steeped in all that had been poisoned by "brother Hitler" to be able to write *Doktor Faustus* (than which no novel is more German in form or content) ten years later and thousands of miles from home. Klaus, however, had not lived long enough; and he felt robbed. He wrote well about his childhood and, in *Der Vulkan* (The Volcano) of 1939, about the elusiveness of exile; Thomas thought this Klaus's best book. But like *Mephisto*, it is not what the son of such a father

# Idylls under threat

A. K. Thorlby

MARTIN AND ERIKA SWALES  
Adalbert Stifter: A critical study  
251pp. Cambridge University Press. £25.  
05212972X

"Another attempt to make Stifter known outside Germanist circles." Not better known, just known, after well over a century. The authors have no illusions about the difficulty of their task. They candidly admit that Stifter's fiction, set in timeless, rural Austria and weighed down with some pretty ponderous writing and thinking, is never far from boredom. Their success is only the more remarkable; they have effectively communicated their sense of slightly puzzled but very real admiration for qualities which do after all justify Stifter's reputation as one of the abiding classics of the German language, and which make him worth reading.

Professor and Mrs Swales pay attention, but not too much respect, to Stifter's philosophical preoccupations, which they show to be responsible for the markedly mannered style and structure of his fiction, as well as for his occasional professions of faith in some universal "gentle law" of nature. It was the kind of belief, compounded half of science and half of religion, which had been easier to sustain in the nineteenth century than it was in the twentieth; to affirm it, Stifter had to idealize order at the expense of individuality. Cosmic order, natural order, scenic order, domestic order, social order, narrative order . . . all religiously interwoven to provide a framework for individual experience which rather obliterates than protects it. Did Stifter have an essentially tragic sense, that everything individual was unjustifiable, vulnerable, doomed, as the authors here suggest? They regard (and use) the language of Schopenhauer as more apt to express this problematic view of individuality, and this has the effect of lending Stifter's style the interest of a prolonged and not always successful struggle against despairism.

what Stifter wanted to affirm and what he deftly intimated, has required much careful attention to nuances of style and subtleties of construction. The Swaleses consider and judge when a text is enriched by contrary elements and when it fails to cohere and convince. They do this without assuming that the reader will know Stifter's story or even that he knows German: quotations, key-words and phrases are all very adequately translated. Thus, any English reader has access here to the "many-layered" richness of Stifter's best-known story, *Bergkristall* (lilies have been wisely left in German). This is a "moving Christian tale" of children saved from death by the radiance of the heavens at Christmas - or is it? Is it perhaps, in a barnless-looking, yet pivotal phrase from the conclusion, "more seriously" something quite different: a story of nature dwarfing man? The Swaleses show that it is both, thanks to a perfect artistic "counterpoint of transcendent energies", in which the "colourful shimmering wings" of the imagination interact with the "empty night sky" of fecundity.

The tension beneath the surface polish of Stifter's style is almost always produced, as here, by the interaction of two distinct elements in each story: catastrophe and reassurance. To some extent, these elements are present in all narrative literature; it is a primary artistic impulse to contain individual experience and particular events within a larger whole. The capacity of art to transcend disaster, danger, suffering and death (again a Schopenhauerian theme) appears to have impressed on Stifter a high, ritualistic idea of the function of writing. He often gives the impression of being engaged in an act of exorcism, the "exorcism", as the Swaleses put it, "of individualisation". Exclusive reliance on art to supply the redeeming touch of transcendent meaning otherwise absent from the world; might suggest that Stifter was a kind of aesthete; certainly many of his contemporaries were, especially in France, and Schopenhauer's metaphysics provide an illuminating commentary on their aestheticism. Less so, however, on Stifter's ideal of a beautifully ordered life in the world.

inevitably aspired to write: a clique is not a cosmos.

During the few years that separated his precocious maturity (novelist, playwright, actor and critic at twenty) from exile in 1933 aged twenty-seven, Klaus's clique included his "twin" sister Erika - later to obtain American citizenship by marrying Auden, thanks to the "family pimp" Isherwood - Gustav Gründgens - the Mephisto of the novel, and Erika's first husband - and Pamela Wedekind. The photographs of this exquisite group in Spangenberg's book are extraordinary. In life, as in *Mephisto*, Pamela married and divorced the much older playwright Carl Sternheim. Both are cruelly caricatured: she as Nicoletta, in love with her dead father (Frank Wedekind of the Lulu plays), Sternheim as Thophilus Marder, a paranoid megalomaniac out of one of his own comedies. Pamela's mother, Tilly Wedekind - a more famous actress than her daughter - had an affair with the poet Gottfried Benn between 1930 and 1936; and it was of course Benn, whom Klaus Mann had idolized, who scorned the *Emigranten* on the radio in 1933. Benn soon went into "inner emigration" himself, and was later to concede the justice of Klaus Mann's bitter reply. But the latter was permanently scarred by this apostasy, and vented his anger in the character of Benjamin Peitz, who "loved National Socialism because it was leading straight to the abyss". Almost all the figures in *Mephisto* are taken from this circle: the Bruckners are the Manns, Hendrik Höfgen's wife Barbara and her mysterious friend Sebastian representing a somewhat anodyne Eriks and Klaus; "the Professor" is Max Reinhardt. The least successful characters are the Nazis: Klaus Mann never came nearer to them than in the Munich café parlour where he overheard Hitler praising a (Jewish) singer.

The film either eliminated or blurred these characters in order to concentrate on Hendrik Höfgen, alias Klaus Mann's brother-in-law Gustav Gründgens. Gründgens became the

most celebrated Mephisto in German theatrical history; Klaus decided to take revenge on him after seeing a photograph of him talking to Goebbels at the bull, given by Goering, with which the novel begins. Those who knew Gründgens, such as Benn, found it hard to see him as demonic. The novel places the moral responsibility for Hendrik Höfgen's decision to return from Paris to make his career in spite of National Socialism squarely upon the protagonist's shoulders. In the Hungarian film, a kind of Brechtian interpretation emphasizes the omnipotence of material circumstances so much that a choice hardly needs to be made. Spangenberg rightly criticizes this. Although the novel quite fails to encompass the impact of National Socialism on Germany, it admirably captures the genuine *neue Sachlichkeit* (new objectivity or sobriety) which, no longer mere pose, seized self-indulgent, incestuous circles like Klaus Mann's in 1933. Almost overnight, these languid youths grew up: whether in exile, like the Manns, or in the resistance, like the Kreisau circle. Hendrik Höfgen is damned because he cannot grow up; by comparison with Thomas Mann's Admire Levertkühn he is not demonic at all, but infantile.

Höfgen as the husk to which the film reduces him has aesthetic interest; but in the novel he has a modest moral significance, if only because Klaus Mann did not renounce his narcissism lightly, as the novelists just before *Mephisto*, *Alexander* and *Symphonie Pühétique*, amply testify. Cocteau wrote an introduction to the utopian *Alexander*, and both are influenced by him and by Gide. *Mephisto* is a temporary escape from the homoerotic, masochistic self-destructiveness of the Tchaikovsky novel - though it is a true document of 1936 in its wishful thinking about the Soviet Union and the imminent collapse of the German economy. It would be absurd to rank Klaus Mann's achievement alongside those of his father and uncle; but if he had been granted a working life as long as theirs, he would still be alive today. Klaus Mann killed himself in 1949.

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JOHN CALDER

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LES REVUES

aléa  
babylone  
l'ennemi

3

CHRISTIAN BOURGOIS ÉDITEUR

## At ground level

Christopher Prendergast

JEAN-PIERRE RICHARD  
Pages paysages: Microlectures II  
257pp. Paris: Seuil.  
202 0068206

In the recent work of Jean-Pierre Richard there has been a change of critical tactic. Following the poetic example of Ponge, the tactic is what he calls "microlecture", where the focus of attention has shifted from the *oeuvre* to the extract or fragment, from the over-view to the close-up, the large world to the small world (here, in a series of readings of some "pages" from Bauelaire, Corbière, Laforgue, Flaubert, Huysmans, Segalen, St John Perse, Colette, Giono, Gracq, Ponge and Barthes). But, in the present climate, one thing is sure: Richard's small worlds would find no place in the fictional *Small World* of David Lodge's comic round-up of contemporary critical fashions. In the global village of Lodge's international academic conference, the upmarket wares peddled by such jet-setting entrepreneurs as Morris Zapp nowhere include the work of Jean-Pierre Richard. Although one of the conferences in Lodge's novel takes place in Geneva, it has nothing to do with the "Geneva school". In the global village, the latter seems to have dropped out of the critical hit-parade. This is at once unimportant and a shame. It is unimportant in so far as what counts for intellectual hot property in the wheeler-dealings of the international market-place is subject to sudden and arbitrary devaluations. It is a shame quite simply because Richard, as perhaps the most gifted living literary critic, does exactly in his critical practice what for a long time one major emphasis of grand Theory has been telling us should be the case: his work blurs radically the distinction between "literature" and "criticism". In Richard's text, "meta-language" and "object-language" fuse as in an act of consubstantiation, whereby the latent or forgotten energies of the latter are imaginatively reactivated in the former. Richard's critical style resembles pastiche (in this as in so many other respects, his mentor is Proust). But it is pastiche entirely without the barb of irony; "original" and "copy" are never in a relation of antagonism (which is one reason why Richard can describe the manic "copying" at the end of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* as a form of *lyrisme*). Richardian pastiche is rather *pastiche amoureuse*, and, if there is anything at all in Barthes's notion that reading, and writing about, literature resemble love-making, Richard's example is its clearest demonstration.

Nevertheless, since there was a time when "thematic criticism" aroused fierce potential passion as an *avant-gardiste* threat to the protocols of the academy, it is perhaps worthwhile pausing to reflect on this relative eclipse from public view, and hence to put *Pages paysages* in the wider context of Richard's work as a whole and its relation to the dominant terms of contemporary literary studies. For if the tactics have changed, the strategy hasn't, and although marked in places by the vocabularies of "poststructuralism", *Pages paysages* remains in all essential respects faithful to a critical enterprise that goes back thirty years to the publication of *Littérature et sensation* and *Poésie et profondeur*.

That continuity is best illustrated by the concluding essay of the present volume, "Terre écrite". The "terre" in question is the "terrain de boules", and the game itself an allegory of Richard's view of writing and textuality. The essay begins by nostalgically recalling Jean Paulhan's Sunday gatherings at the Arènes de Lutèce. One might have surmised that, for Paulhan, playing boules was relaxation from the onerous responsibilities of editing and writing for the *Nouvelle Revue Française*. For Richard the two activities are of a piece. The "Jeu de boules" resembles writing in at least three respects: it gives an "apprentissage spontané de la matière"; it vigorously affirms a presence; an *être-là* (in the psychoanalytical perspective frequently invoked, and often contested, in the book, it is a game in which there is always the pleasure of a *du*, but never the anguish of *nul*); thirdly, it provides an initiation into an "écologie de la surface". The ecology of the "terrain de boules" is of course, a

special one: it is a "micro-écologie" (like Ponge's "pain"); it is irregular and unpredictable, and, even for the expert player, allowance must always be made of the unexpected, the aleatory (here we recognize perhaps Richard's concession to the influential emphasis on textual dissemination and randomization).

Yet the metaphor of "ecology", like the title of the book, reproduces what has always been the commanding term of Richard's critical practice. Texts are like landscapes. *Pages/Paysages*: the latter contain the former; the "pages" constitute a "world", a "universe" (*L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé*) ordered according to a certain thematic topography. The word "paysage" recurs throughout (notably in the essays on Baudelaire, Flaubert, Colette, Giono), and recalls earlier titles (*Paysage de Chateaubriand*, *Géographie magique de Nerval*). The world of the text is a world that can be "mapped", and its critical reconstruction is primarily a matter of scanning and positioning its privileged *topoi*. Even in the work of writers apparently resistant to mapping (the nomadic restlessness of the Rimbaud text, forever geared to departure; the indeterminate "geography" of Nerval's Valois, full of tracks without sign-posts, in which both narrator and reader are liable to lose their way), there is always a detachable plan or "pattern"—at least from the aerial view of the earlier work, less so from the close-up of *microlecture*.

Mapping textual topographies calls for a certain method. Informally, we could call this the "re-shuffle" technique, in which the elements of the text are treated like a deck of cards dealt in different ways according to the nature of the patterns to be revealed. A more jaded view might see here the concealed work of the card-index file (every reference to the *oeuvre* in the Stendhalian *oeuvre* systematically classified). But if, as a working method, it can yield results as dazzlingly brilliant as Richard's, this can only redound to the otherwise much despised card-index as a complement to its potential imaginative resource. In more formalist terms, Richard's textual mapping corresponds to "paradigmatic" criticism, in Todorov's sense of relating elements "plus ou moins éloignés dans la texte". The question the method raises, of course, is what guarantees the reliability of the map? Since the paradigmatic *combinatoire* can generate very many different patternings, on what grounds choose one rather than another? Richard is resolutely undogmatic on this (it is never a question of usurping pluralist reading in the name of the Single Correct Interpretation). On the other hand, the question of the "ground", the grounding, of the critical procedure remains, and, in more radical guise (eg, Derrida's), opens on to the question as to whether there is any ground at all, as distinct from the ceaselessly displacing movement of *différance*.

From *Poésie et profondeur* to *Pages paysages*, Richard's basic position, although it has undergone certain modifications, has remained the same, and, in that regard, his approach is at the opposite pole to that of Derrida. "Pattern" exists in the text; there is a "centre" (even in the most self-decenting of writers); above all, there is an "origin", a foundation to the surface dispositions of the text's geography. The preface to *Pages paysages* affirms the identity of the two terms of the title. There is no "before" (an already constituted author's psyche, in the manner of Charles Mauron's "psychocritique"). The *paysages* are constructed, and can be apprehended, only as *pages*; the former are not separable from their material embodiment as writing. On the other hand, there is still an assumption of anteriority. The *paysage* takes its shape from an "ordre secret", whose disclosure is the object of Richard's hermeneutic.

The key to the secret lies in what Richard calls "des formes thématico-pulsionnelles", which apply the fundamental methods of an "univers singulier". This repeats almost exactly the programme outlined in the preface to *Poésie et profondeur*: the search for the "moment premier", the "intention profonde" of the literary work; and it reveals the broad intellectual context in which the whole of Richard's enterprise is situated; roughly, that of the existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and the "substantialist" psychoanalysis of Bachelard, "intention" here has, like, to do

with its sense in the philosophy of language, speech-act theory. It designates, as for Merleau-Ponty, a complex existential and affective movement of consciousness towards the world, it is rooted in "sensation", mediated by the body (above all the *skin*: the "epidermal" sensibility of the Goncourt brothers described in *Littérature et sensation* is echoed here in the "scénarios exotiques de la peau" in the poetry of Segalen), and is transformed into what Bachelard calls "réverie". It is, however, a "subject"-oriented criticism, predicated on the belief in the ultimate coherence and unique singularity of a Subject, of which the work is then, as it were, the distinctive signature. And this remains so even in the case of poets such as Perse and Laforgue; in Perse, the self is articulated through the figure of ellipsis; Laforgue's poem, with the line beginning "Donc n'en va pas" is analysed in such a way as to make of the line a veritable "performative" of the dispersal and fragmentation of subjectivity. Nevertheless, the displacing energies of both poets can always be recalled to a "centre", re-situated on the "map" of sensibility.

It is not difficult to see why, in recent times, the continually fertile work of Richard has tended to fall on stony ground. All its major categories have been subjected to the most rigorous deconstructionist treatment. Derrida pointed out, as long ago as *L'Écriture et la différence*, the in-built teleology of Richard's approach, whereby everything in the *oeuvre* of a writer comes into being in order to conform to, or re-realize, a "pattern" already given in the determining "origin" of a subjectivity. There is also the question of contemporary psychoanalysis, in particular Lacan's drastic re-casting of the Freudian subject, with which Richard throughout *Pages paysages* maintains a running, if modest, battle (notably in the closing page of the essay on Gracq). Where Lacan poses an aboriginally divided subject, the hopeless dilemma of desiring/lacking, Richard, true to his Bachelardian inspiration, insists rather on presence, plenitude, *opulence*, as the voice of desire in a state of happiness.

Another of the recurring terms of *Pages paysages* is "euphorie", and it crops up in the most unlikely places: Gracq's famous "bulle" is the bubble before it bursts, the "euphorie de la bulle"; that catalogue of disasters, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, nevertheless has its moment of pure euphoria ("l'euphorie de la réincorporation") when the two heroes first install themselves in their farm. Finally, there is Huysmans's *A Vau-l'eau*: "Peu d'épisodes heureux dans *A Vau-l'eau*" is the superlatively redundant opening remark of Richard's essay. But what starts as no news abruptly becomes good news: the irredeemably old and desolate world of Huysmans also has an outlet into euphoria, in the unexpected "plaisir pervers des quais de Seine".

More generally, we might say that Richard is a bringer of literary good news. This, of course, would not be good news to those St. Lodge's international academic conference. There are honourable, not to say vital, reasons why this should be so, if only because of the necessity to break open the lles and interests buried in the discourses of other kinds of international condition, or where it was going to end. By some miracle of mosaic composition Dolfi has made one readable volume out of this chaos, discarding repetitions, relegating the many short passages which deal pertinently with this or that author to the notes, and finding a plausible order for the whole. Thanks to her this *Avventura del Novecento* (the title is one of her best intuitions), incomplete and fragmentary though it may be, is almost certainly a fuller and clearer representation of his thinking than Jacobbi would ever have managed by himself. At the same time the fundamentally restless quality of his work comes through — the way in which he could bring together on a single page an amazing wealth of information and ideas, but inevitably leave any synthesis he achieved open to revision and supplementation.

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## Specializing in vain

Masolino d'Amico

FRANCESCA DURANTI  
La casa sul lago della luna  
118pp. Milan: Rizzoli. L15.000.

The best Italian novel to be published so far this year did not win any of the "major" literary prizes (Strega, Viareggio, Campiello), but this is unsurprising. As every observer of the Italian literary scene knows, these are only given to well known writers: a first novel may have a chance if the author's name is Umberto Eco — or, as in the case of Lampedusa, after the author's death.

Strictly speaking, Francesca Duranti, now in her early forties, is not a beginner: La Tartaruga, a publishing house which specializes in women writers, had already submitted *La Bambina* and *Piazza mia bella piazza* (two autobiographical works, although the latter was labelled as fiction) as candidates for literary prizes. But *La casa sul lago della luna* has brought her her first real critical success. It has weathered well, and all the officially acclaimed fiction which appeared during the summer has failed to wipe it from one's memory.

Fabrizio Garrone is a cultured man with much more than a smattering of knowledge of several subjects, who earns his living translating German writers. His forbidden dream is

however to get some sort of recognition as a specialist and one day that dream seems about to come true. Browsing in a secondhand bookshop he finds an obscure article by Giorgio Pasquali, the great critic and philologist, dated 1913, in which high praise is given to *Das Haus am Mondsee*, a novel by an Austrian, Fritz Oberhofer. The author is unknown and the privately printed novel is not to be found in any catalogue at Fabrizio's immediate disposal. Following a hunch, Fabrizio goes to Vienna, where, after an imaginative series of incidents and false clues, he finds the only surviving copy of the book (whose author had died shortly after publication) in a window seat of a small hotel on the Moon Lake (or Mondsee), a few miles from Salzburg.

Oberhofer's novel — a love story — is superb, and Fabrizio's friend Mario masterminds its launching. He likes Fabrizio's translation, and commissions him to write a short biography of the mysterious Oberhofer. This Fabrizio does in great haste; but, confronted with the total lack of evidence about his subject's last and all-devouring passion — which was probably the inspiration for the novel — invents the woman whom Oberhofer loved on the banks of the Mondsee, and gives her the perfectly plausible name of Maria Rettner.

Both novel and biography are published to universal acclaim: Oberhofer becomes world famous, but it is "Maria" who apparently

attracts everybody's fancy. Hollywood even wants to make a film about the "real" character — not Oberhofer's idealization. Fabrizio is now a sort of authority, but somehow this is not what he wanted. Then a telephone caller, Fräulein Petra Ebner from Mondsee, offers him another scoop: Oberhofer's letters to Maria Rettner. "You see, signor Garrone, Maria Rettner was my grandmother."

Is Fräulein Ebner a swindler, or is Fabrizio's invention of Maria Rettner an astounding coincidence? Understandably curious, Fabrizio rushes to Mondsee and there he meets the oddly fascinating, lonely spinster who rang him and who now seems loth to answer his questions.

Better perhaps not to reveal the rest of the plot, though it is not a suspense story. Indeed, it is not really about the actuality of Maria Rettner, nor, even, about the literary excellence of Franz Oberhofer, any more than *The Aspern Papers* was about the coveted manuscripts. With its clever views of the Italian literary establishment as seen from the fringe, *La casa sul lago della luna* is mainly a witty, convincing portrait of a dilettante, or gentleman of taste and refinement, hopelessly ill at ease in a world which he neither likes nor understands: and of his growing obsession with literature, or Art, as the ultimate, and yet strangely disappointing, reality.

as the greatest symbolist poet in Italy, embroiled with the dark forces of death and sex, not just explicitly, but also in his sensuous, archaizing style, with its seductive music. Here, for Jacobbi, there is rich poetry and also the necessary expression of energies and tensions in the new Italy which official culture chose to ignore or to dismiss.

All this is refreshing and in some ways persuasive. Certainly along the way there are fine discussions of individual poems, many previously undervalued or unknown. Something similar happens in a subsequent chapter on Futurism, in which Futurism itself is rejected as being the cultural arm of expansionist entrepreneurship, but Marinetti, its prime publicist and protagonist, is partly redeemed on the basis of his almost unknown surreal plays and novels of the 1920s. But when Jacobbi turns to the now canonical figures of the Italian twentieth century, Svevo, Pirandello, Ungaretti, Montale, his writing becomes a good deal less vigorous and a good deal more schematic, perhaps (it is hard not to think) because all four have been so thoroughly embalmed that for the moment it is impossible to bring them back to life. The interest only quickens once again in the later chapters, mostly already published separately, on the Florentine poets whom Jacobbi knew personally and whom he considers to have taken symbolism one step further. As in earlier parts of the book, the reader has the impression of being invited to participate in a critical conversation of the best kind, largely free from professional deformation and pretensions to Olympian wisdom, but informed, personal, affirmative and open-ended.

but some elements have remained constant. Leading politicians and statesmen have rarely enriched themselves by means of corruption but have used it to reinforce their power and that of their party or faction. Politicians, regardless of party affiliation, have tended to cover up each other's misdeeds. Scandals, and potential scandals, have frequently been used in political infighting, to discredit or neutralize an opponent, and this has been done as often within parties as between them: the history of the Christian Democrats, "condemned to govern" since the war, has been particularly rich in such episodes.

The persistence of a tradition of corruption, prompts one to ask why corruption is apparently necessary for the operation of the Italian political system. Turone's book does not theorize sufficiently. The Political Economy of Corruption has yet to find its Adam Smith or

## Looking to the present

Peter Hainsworth

RUGGERO JACOBBI  
L'Avventura del Novecento  
Edited by Anna Dolfi  
619pp. Milan: Garzanti. L. 30,000.

Ruggero Jacobbi is not an easy figure to pin down. He was a poet, and, as a very young man, involved with the so-called hermetic poets of 1930s Florence. Then for fifteen years after the war he was also a playwright and theatre and television director in Brazil, working at least as much in Portuguese as in Italian. When he came back to Italy in 1960 he went on with theatrical work, but also published a great deal of criticism, much of it in obscure periodicals, on a vast range of modern writing.

When he died in 1981, Jacobbi had been working for twenty years on two projects, which, if they had ever been completed, would have been major syntheses of his thinking and interests, one a history of modern Italian literature, the other an anthology-cum-manual. But, given Jacobbi's cast of mind, both projects were unfinished. As Anna Dolfi, who took on the job of editor after his death, explains, she was faced by a mass of drafts and fragments, much of which might have been for either project and some perhaps for neither: it was unclear what shape the history was going to have after its beginnings in the post-unification period, or where it was going to end.

By some miracle of mosaic composition Dolfi has made one readable volume out of this chaos, discarding repetitions, relegating the many short passages which deal pertinently with this or that author to the notes, and finding a plausible order for the whole. Thanks to her this *Avventura del Novecento* (the title is one of her best intuitions), incomplete and fragmentary though it may be, is almost certainly a fuller and clearer representation of his thinking than Jacobbi would ever have managed by himself. At the same time the fundamentally restless quality of his work comes through — the way in which he could bring together on a single page an amazing wealth of information and ideas, but inevitably leave any synthesis he achieved open to revision and supplementation.

Jacobbi recognized that literary history, like any history, rests on shaky foundations, and though he was ready to make use of Marxist and psychoanalytic ideas, he had no confidence in any specific system or methodology would sort things out. There would always be the basic problem that all magisterial overviews are false; since there is always another part or another side to the story. One way of

the earlier chapters of the book, is to make broad generalizing surveys of cultural, political and literary developments, juxtaposing them with detailed examinations of specific time-segments and selected minor figures. This works well when, say, Jacobbi is following through the complexities of Italian symbolism of the 1890s, but there are risks in including figures who are commonly left out. Jacobbi may be right to claim that Agostino Sinadino was the most important Mallarmean poet in turn-of-the-century Italy; doubts arise when it becomes clear that uncertainty surrounds his name, nationality, career, dates of birth and death, and that most of his significant early work has been lost.

Partly because it assumes a definitely polemical edge, Jacobbi's socialist-humanistic way of thinking is at its most fruitful in the large amount of material (more than half the book) on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The main target is the bourgeois idealism of Croce, against which Jacobbi sets the socialism of Antonio Labriola and the more obscure Rodolfo Mondolfo. Croce's main failing as a critic is identified as his blindness to the positive and forward-looking aspects of what he (and after him Italian criticism generally) called decadence. But the prime "decadents" — Fogazzaro, Pascoli and D'Annunzio — were in fact voicing complex social and cultural transformations, not so much when they played at being prophets and bards, but in what they did on the page. Sexuality and Catholicism meet in Fogazzaro, socialist aspiration and its historical failure in the best of Pascoli. Jacobbi is most enthusiastic about D'Annunzio, whom he sees

## Shady business

Gilbert Reid

SERGIO TURONE  
Corrotti e corruttori: Dali' Unità d'Italia alla P2  
371pp. Rome: Laterza. L15.000.

Like most mysterious and fascinating phenomena, political and financial corruption in Italy has generated a huge literature. Sergio Turone's *Corrotti e corruttori* attempts to give an over-all view and a running narrative of corruption from the 1860s to the present. His account is sometimes exciting, often intriguing, and occasionally tendentious and unclear. It is possible, however, to extract some interesting generalizations from his text.

The machinery and style of corruption has

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par christian bourgeois



Amnon Sella

JOHN ERICKSON  
The Road to Berlin  
877pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £20.  
0297772384

"Musing on the atrocities recorded on history's page, we feel that the ideal motive has often served as a camouflage for the lust for destruction," wrote Freud in a letter to Albert Einstein. *The Road to Berlin* is a perfect illustration of the "lust for destruction". It is not a book about the philosophy of war yet its message is a philosophical admonition: beware of war.

Formally, the book is divided into eight chapters; informally into four sections: first "the operational narrative", to use John Erickson's own definition; then the political-diplomatic wrangles; next, the references and sources, making "a second book"; to use the author's own words again, and perhaps the most exhaustive compilation of its kind in a single volume. The fourth informal division, however, is the most problematic because it is never made explicit: but time and again, in a style verging on the poetic, Professor Erickson searches for the human meaning of the "lust for destruction".

In a fleeting, perhaps inadvertent manner the book touches on a major theme: the essence of war. When the Red Army was still engaged on defence, it fought tooth and nail to shield families and as the end-term of a long

string of associations, its homeland, but in its offensive when it came, there was a burning desire for revenge. This desire was at times indeed transformed into a "lust for destruction", and towards the end of the war into a race, sometimes reckless, to trample on "the air of the Fascist beast". The Wehrmacht was driven by an inhuman ideology, but the Red Army, which had not been immunized against senseless brutalities, gradually degenerated in the process of its struggle. When eventually on the road to Berlin, and over the wreckage of the Führer's bunker, the time for reckoning came, the vanquished were left with the pain of defeat, and the victors with the poisonous fruits of a broken civilization.

*The Road to Berlin* recounts the tale of intransigent generals fighting to the bitter end against other unyielding but eventually desperate generals. At the head of ever-growing mechanized power. This emphasis on generals and mechanized power distinguishes this second volume of Erickson's history from the first: whereas *The Road to Stalingrad* was strewn with the heroic deeds of the private soldier and stained with the blood of the individual victim, *The Road to Berlin* is littered with the dazzling or shattered dreams of marshals and with the burning remains of armoured fighting vehicles.

Stalin hovers over the battlefield more influentially than ever. "His is performance the ghost at any feast of retrospective reputations," writes Erickson. He is without doubt the warlord: the master of strategy and detail. He coordinates the various fronts and allots divi-

sions from the reserves. Perhaps the most interesting acquisition to his character during the war was the ability to compromise, to bargain, to give way. This was not the result of any softening of his iron will nor was it revealed to adversaries, but under the circumstances of war and in the company of his generals and marshals, for the sake of victory, Stalin learnt how to give way. On one rare, indeed unique, occasion we are allowed a glimpse of Stalin as true human being, as a worried father, when he tells Zhukov that he is concerned about his son, Yakov, who is a prisoner-of-war.

Deep down, however, Stalin remained the master of politics. Given favourable circumstances, he proved unmatched in his handling of grand political strategy and his ability to exploit fruitful situations. The Yalta Conference was the arena for some of his most masterly manoeuvring. Circumstances favoured him: the Red Army had already liberated and occupied several East European countries at terrible cost. This fact alone made it well-nigh impossible to argue with Stalin, but on top of it Roosevelt was weak and ill and the English-speaking alliance was breaking up. Stalin, depicted in this book as the great architect of the conference, made excellent use of the disagreement between Churchill and Roosevelt, over the Second Front. Erickson devotes many pages to this problem, which has been discussed over and over again yet remains unresolved because behind and beyond the endless rational arguments is the imponderable factor of the cost of victory. An Anglo-American landing could perhaps have been staged a year earlier than it was, at enormous cost. Had that happened, the Yalta conference might then have taken place in Vienna or in a Prague liberated by the Americans.

As things were, however, Stalin the peace-maker was impregnable. His armies had bled for the territories they liberated and held, he could still pour in many more new divisions, he had the initiative and he was not prepared to lose it. He offered his generous help in fighting Japan, in his own good time, and for a price. He also achieved the new partition of Poland to which the other two leaders could only grunt and assent, not out of pusillanimity but as an indirect result of the 1942 decision not to open a Second Front.

The terrifying side of Stalin is revealed by the horrendous account Erickson gives of the Warsaw uprising of the Armia Krajowa. Typically, he does not take sides nor pass verdicts, yet there is a feeling throughout this account that the Poles were made use of, that Stalin could have decided otherwise, that despite the exhaustion of the Red Army at the end of a long and arduous offensive, it could all have been different if Stalin had not held the Poles in contempt and seen the benefit of having the Armia Krajowa destroyed by the Germans.

Erickson's "operational narrative" is a priceless index to the many tactical units of the Red

Army towards the end of the war, even if the panorama he gives is not always easy to read or to follow. At more than one point there is a urgent need of an over-view to give perspective. Yet the reward is there for the reader who perseveres, to discover after a while that he is being shown the profile of the Red Army, the out the help of graphs or elaborate tables, and with a great deal of that great army's history into the bargain. It is all there—the Napoleonic Wars and the First World War, the history of the Soviet Union and the Soviet art of war. Among leading Soviet theoreticians, Triandafilov comes to mind whenever there is mention of the "depth" of the battlefield, an idea developed by him during the 1920s, much too early for the industrial capability of the Soviet Union. Half-way through the war with Germany, however, during the battle of Kursk, concept and capability were married, to shattering effect.

An important theme is river crossings. It seems as though the Red Army fought its way across an endless number of rivers during the war, a lesson learnt then and improved on since. Thus strategic thought not only draws past experience but is also the foundation for systematic theory for the future. Among the tactical ideas, it is perhaps worth mentioning that did not work at the time but which was used in the battle for Jerusalem in the Six-Day War. The "operational narrative" raises other problems too: for instance, the difference in fighting quality between Soviet forces in the north and in other sectors of the front. The book does not mention the lingering tension between Leningrad and Moscow, but there is no mistaking the comparatively weak performance of the troops in the north.

How much of the realignments in Europe after 1945 was actually decided by the fortunes of war and how much was engineered or planned? Erickson suggests that Stalin looked deep into the future of eastern Europe and prepared the political outcome of the war very carefully. This was the case in Poland, Hungary and Germany. He would probably have done the same in Yugoslavia had he been given the chance. In his choice between the possible and the desirable, he took the possible in his stride and was prepared to pay a high price to achieve the desirable. This may be the explanation for his conduct in Poland and over the siege of Budapest, and why he fostered the competition between Zhukov and Konev in their race for Berlin, when the former was ready to discard all consideration for human lives simply in order to get there first and earn the title of conqueror of Berlin.

The final lesson of this book perhaps is that on the road to Berlin the backbone of the Wehrmacht was broken, but that in its death throes it tarnished the spirit of Europe and tore its civilization apart.

## Under cover

George Theiner

ANTONIN LIJHM and PETER KUSKI (Editors)  
The Writing on the Wall: An anthology of contemporary Czech literature  
252pp. New York: Karz-Coll.  
0943828538

Unable to get any of their work published in their own country, the majority of Czechoslovakia's best writers and poets have taken refuge in *samizdat*—typewritten novels, collections of verse or of short stories, plays, as well as philosophical treatises and books on historical, sociological, political, or religious topics. These circulate in the country, are eagerly passed from hand to hand and retyped many times by willing volunteers, who risk severe penalties if caught.

A small sample of this underground literary output from Prague has now become available in English in the form of an anthology of short stories and *feuilletons* by eighteen banned authors. Edited by Antonin Liebm, himself a proscribed Czech writer now living in Paris, and Peter Kuski, who is also one of the eight translators responsible for the competent and readable English versions, *The Writing on the*

*Wall* is the first collection of its kind to appear in English.

The authors whose work is to be found here include Václav Havel and Ludvík Vaculík, the originator of the best-known Prague *samizdat* series, *Edice Patice* (Padlock Publications), who breathed new life into the old genre of the *feuilleton*, previously very popular in Czechoslovakia, where it was employed by such practitioners as Jan Neruda and Karel Capek. Of the other contributors, Jitka Grise (author of *The Questionnaire*, a novel recently published here by Faber) has since emigrated to West Germany, Pavel Kohout has been prevented by the Czech authorities from returning home after a stint at the Burg Theater in Vienna; Jitka Pavlová is likewise in Austria; Jaroslav Hladík and Vlastimil Třešňák in Sweden. This is itself eloquent testimony to the dire state of affairs in present-day Czech literature.

This important collection has been compiled with care, giving the English reader an all-too-rare opportunity to judge the talents and literary abilities of those "dangerous subversives" whom the Husák regime has been trying, to silence for fifteen years—trying, but so far, thanks to the authors, editors, and translators, of *samizdat*, without success.

## Power without influence

David Welsh

DUNCAN INNES  
Anglo-American and the Rise of Modern South Africa  
358pp. Heinemann. Paperback, £8.50.  
0435963511

By any yardstick the Anglo American Corporation of South Africa is a giant. Together with its associated companies it has interests, often large ones, in every sector of the South African economy, as well as in forty-five other countries all over the globe. Its mainstay is mining, especially gold mining. Some idea of Anglo's scale can be inferred from the fact that it produces 38 per cent of South Africa's gold (which is about 24 per cent of all Western production), 43 per cent of its uranium and 25 per cent of its coal. Through De Beers, Anglo also controls some two-thirds of the world's diamond production.

Duncan Innes attempts to describe Anglo's development against the background of South Africa's history. He traces the early development of the diamond industry in Kimberley and the subsequent opening up of gold mining in the Witwatersrand in the 1880s and after. Much of this is familiar history, but Innes offers his own neo-Marxist account of the origins of South African "monopoly capital" in isolating the particular forebears from which Anglo was formed in 1917.

After modest beginnings, Anglo had the good fortune to acquire control of some of the richest goldfields on the Far East Rand in the 1920s, and thereafter, in the post-war period, it became the dominant force in the lucrative fields of the Orange Free State. The 1950s and 60s saw its prodigious expansion into finance, banking and manufacturing. Innes lists, in an appendix, 656 companies which, according to him, made up the Anglo American group in 1976. Though there may be doubts about the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the list, they at least provide an indication of Anglo America's vast scale and diversity.

## Plain tales from the Cape

Geoffrey Wheatcroft

HARRIET SERGEANT  
Between the Lines: Conversations in South Africa  
223pp. Cape. £8.95.  
024 02211 3

"Well, what do you think of our country?" the visitor to South Africa is regularly asked; not quite a loaded question but remarkably difficult to answer. ("It's very beautiful", is a convenient answer, evasive but true.) Not much easier is the same question on return: Well, what's it really like? There is no country like South Africa; so much written and talked about, object of so much rhetoric—and yet so rarely described as it really is. In fact another truthful answer to Europeans who hate it from afar is, "Yes, ghastly, but not in the way that you think."

Four years ago Harriet Sergeant, an English journalist in her mid-twenties, went to Johannesburg. She seems to have been at a loose end, hoping to write for one or two British papers, looking for fun including amorous adventures (not difficult to find in South Africa, for all the grotesque "Immorality Act"). She made friends, she travelled from Johannesburg to the coast—the story begins at East London—and back to Durban and to Capetown, taking note of what she saw and heard. She wrote the story up and offered it to a publisher who to her surprise accepted it.

Between the Lines is the result: a modest little book but rather a good one. Miss Sergeant wrote as a reporter and not as a commentator or analyst. She had no axes to grind and no theories to demonstrate. Instead she kept her eyes and her ears open, listened to what people said, noticed how they said it. She

South African historiography badly needs scholarly examinations of individual enterprises. So far there have been mostly bland, sanitized official company histories and excessively hagiographic biographies of individual entrepreneurs. But for all his diligence in combing through company reports and other data and his laudable pioneering spirit, Innes ultimately fails to provide a rounded and convincing account of Anglo. Despite his disavowal of economic determinism, his neo-Marxist assumptions lead him to make several crudely reductionist statements. For example, the Union of South Africa was established in 1910 "so as to facilitate political domination for capital". Actually, it was rather more complex than that: some of the Union's principal architects hoped that it would be a means of controlling capitalists, who, in any case, have seldom enjoyed political dominance. Elsewhere Innes writes of "the racial forms which capital itself imposed on the industry at an earlier stage of its development". To blame the capitalists for the industrial colour-bar is misleading: they had to adapt their labour practices to a society whose racial stratification was firmly established well before the rise of the mining industry. In the conclusion, Innes suggests a causal relationship between intensified monopolization inside South Africa and South African "imperialism" in Southern Africa, including especially Namibia. This contention requires evidence of collusion between state and capital, but none is offered. A more plausible explanation would be to explain this "imperialism" primarily in political and diplomatic terms, while acknowledging that South African entrepreneurs would avail themselves of such opportunities as these initiatives might create.

Much of the book concerns South Africa's "monopoly capital", a concept that Innes uses in a qualified Leninist sense which remains very imprecise. In fact, it is more of a slogan than a precise analytical tool. As he acknowledges, gold mining, which is the core of Anglo's activities, can hardly be a monopoly in any strict sense, seeing that it involves several companies who sell all they produce at a price

they cannot fix. Innes is correct to note the growing domination of particular markets by larger companies—even official reports acknowledge this—but invariably these are oligopolistic, and not monopolistic, situations, within which quite fierce competition can still occur. In several of his accounts of various markets—for example, the construction industry and in merchant and commercial banking—he appears seriously to underestimate the extent of actual competition.

More serious criticisms of *Anglo American and the Rise of Modern South Africa* stem from the failure adequately to define the idea of control in inter-company relationships. Control cannot simply be inferred from the percentage of equity capital in one company that is owned by another company. Innes says incorrectly that a company may exercise effective control over another with less than 51 per cent ownership, especially if it is the biggest single shareholder. It is not entirely clear whether in listing the 656 companies that formed the Anglo American Group he is implying their effective control by Anglo or merely Anglo's involvement. For instance, in his account of Barlow Rand, another giant mining-industrial-financial conglomerate, Innes claims that "there can be no doubt, to put it mildly, that Anglo American is a powerful influence". In addition he lists a number of other Barlow Rand-controlled companies as being part of the Anglo Group under the heading "Anglo holding company". This is questionable: Anglo does indeed have a small equity interest in Barlow Rand, but it has never controlled it and the extent of its alleged influence must be precisely ascertained. Bland assertions of "powerful influence" will not suffice: hard evidence must be produced to substantiate the claim.

A more egregious example of this methodological weakness is Innes's analysis of the control of South Africa's English-language newspapers. According to him, seventeen out of the

twenty newspapers are directly or indirectly controlled by Anglo through a complex "pyramiding" arrangement. Harry Oppenheimer, until recently the chairman of Anglo American Corporation, often claimed that Anglo did not interfere with editorial policy, but Innes dismisses this, suggesting that "since he owns the newspapers anyway, such 'interference' is unnecessary". He adds that the new Zimbabwean government did not seem to share Oppenheimer's views because in 1981 it bought out the Anglo-controlled dominant interest in Zimbabwe's two largest newspapers.

If Innes's contentions are correct, how does he explain the ferocious, indeed cannibalistic, competition currently raging between the newspaper companies that Anglo purports to control? And how would he explain the widely divergent editorial positions taken over last year's referendum on the new South African constitution? And, alas, would it not be more accurate to explain the Zimbabwean government's action simply as a dislike of editorial independence?

A major theme of the book is Anglo American's "awesome" power: it is, Innes claims, "a major force in the economic, political and social life of the country" and "actively involved at a number of levels in influencing the direction of political change in southern Africa." He purports to assess Anglo American "in relation to the policies and actions of the South African state", and his findings refer to "the decisive power which monopoly groups like Anglo American wield" in South Africa. The problem is that Innes demonstrates no such thing. To describe Anglo American's power as "decisive" is ludicrous. On the contrary, the interesting question that arises is why, for all its undoubted economic muscle, Anglo has wielded so little political influence. Indeed, there are good grounds for believing that if Anglo did have the decisive influence imputed to it, South Africa might be in less of a mess than it is today.

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## TYPOLOGICAL STUDIES IN LANGUAGE

A new series, *Typological Studies in Language*, with only 5 titles in print, has already shown that it will be a series which achieves the goal of tight focus. Professor T. Givón, chairman of the linguistics department at the University of Oregon and general editor of *Typological Studies in Language*, views the series as substantive rather than formal, with a functional and typological orientation covering specific topics in language by associating data from a wide variety of languages and language typologies. Prof. Givón's ultimate aim is to investigate universals of human language via as broadly defined a data base as possible, with a preference for cross-linguistic, diachronic, developmental and live-discourse data.

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# Darwin in essence

David Macdonald

ELLIOTT SOBER (Editor)  
Conceptual Issues in Evolutionary Biology:  
An anthology  
725pp. MIT Press. £36 (paperback, £17.95).  
0 262 19220 9

The first three of the thirty-five essays in Elliott Sober's bulky anthology are collectively entitled "Guiding Idens in Evolutionary Biology", and each in its different way juggles with the tenets of evolutionary theory in attempts to identify the essence of the Darwinian revolution. In a short and readable essay, first published in 1959, Ernst Mayr writes of Darwin's three contributions which distinguish the ideas of a long prehistory from those that have flourished since "year zero" in history (1859, the year of publication of the *Origin of Species*). For Mayr, Darwin's contribution was, first, to amass compendious evidence of the occurrence of evolution, second, to present natural selection as the mechanism (echoing the mood of H. J. Muller's conclusion in 1949, that Darwin's was "undoubtedly the most revolutionary theory of all time" and "an intellectual monument that is unsurpassed in the history of human thought") and, third, to replace typological thinking with population thinking. It is this third facet on which Mayr dwells, arguing clearly that these two ways of thinking are precisely opposite: for the typologist (Plato or Aristotle), types are real and variation among individuals is an inconsequential distraction; for the populationist the type is simply an average, an abstraction, and only variation is real.

R. C. Lewontin, on the other hand, concludes that the core of Darwinism is not the introduction of evolutionism as a "world view", nor the emphasis on natural selection as the main force of evolution (on the grounds that most genetic divergence observable between species at a molecular level is thought by

some net to be the product of selection), but rather that Darwin's contribution was to supplant a metaphysical view of variation among organisms with a materialistic one. Lewontin's article, first published in 1974, goes on to explore the role of studies of population genetics within evolutionary theory, emphasizing the huge complexity of the task of describing the genetic state of a population, subject to transformation from one generation to the next, under the influence of diverse mating systems, migrations, dispersals and a wide array of epigenetic phenomena.

In the last essay of this introductory trilogy, Richard Levins discusses the strategy of model-building in population biology. His essay concludes with one of those apodictic, interlarded diagrams, as intriguing to the theoretician as they are demoralizing to the ecological practitioner, showing how everything is related to everything else (in this case, arrows stab a route between more than two dozen boxes, each of which houses topics such as predator-prey systems, habitat selection, developmental biology and coevolution). Levins skillfully separates the wood from the trees while maintaining a pleasingly realistic awareness of the existence of both. He illustrates three alternative ecological models: ones which sacrifice generality to realism and precision; ones which sacrifice reality to generality and precision; and ones which sacrifice precision to realism and generality. He draws an appealing analogy to emphasize the different levels of resolution at which models can be useful: looking at a map we know that contiguity on paper implies contiguity in reality, and that relative distances correspond to distances on the ground, but the map's colours are arbitrary and a microscopic view of it would show fibres of paper. In mathematical models of population biology it is not always clear when we are using too high a magnification.

Following this introduction there are six further sections of the book. To list only the authors, titles and original publication details

of these contributions would take the entire space of this review, so suffice it to say that major sections (and authors) include "Fitness" (Gould, Mills, Beatty, Brandon, Williams and Rosenberg), "The Units of Selection" (Gould, Dawkins, Wimsatt, Seber and Lewontin), "Adaptation" (Lewontin, Gould, Oster, Wilson and Maynard Smith), "Function and Teleology" (Nagel, Wright, Beorae and Cummins), "The Reduction of Mendelian Genetics to Molecular Biology" (Nagel, Schaffner, Ruse, Hull, Wimsatt and Maul) and "The Nature of Species" (Mayr, Sokal, Crovello, Hull, Henning, Felsenstein and Farris). It is helpful that these articles of disparate origin and content are linked in a common index. Each section contains papers which originally appeared in biological texts and others first published for a readership of philosophers. In his preface, Sober links these two disciplines (philosophy assembles definitions of concepts; science applies these concepts to the empirical world) and predicts, correctly, that the reader may often be uncertain whether what is being done in a given chapter is philosophy or science.

To mention randomly, and unfairly, a hand-

ful of chapters, I particularly enjoyed S. J. Gould's three contributions. Gould's skill as a writer aside, his titles alone enliven this book - "The spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian Paradigm" and "Darwin's eminently death" have an alluring something to comparison to, eg. "Informal aspects of theory reduction". Among either eloquent articles Richard Dawkins's espousal of replicator selection, in which he also describes the changing meaning of the term "fitness", from Herbert Spencer's "athleticism" to the contemporary one of reproductive success.

One of the anthology's declared aims is to provide a new, broader synthesis of evolutionary science and philosophy. The sheer size of the volume, and therefore the time, effort and knowledge required to absorb the overall picture it seeks to convey, make it hard to fulfil that aim. Perhaps if the editor had given us a synthesis of its contents, it would have helped to bind the book together. However, the papers reprinted here have already had undoubted influence, and, at the least, this book will save undergraduates a lot of foot-leather in the quest for essay material.

## Endlessly diverse

Tim Halliday

DAVID ATTENBOROUGH  
The Living Planet: A portrait of the earth  
320pp, with colour illustrations. Collins/BBC  
Publications. £12.  
Collins: 0 00 219 139 3  
BBC: 0 563 20207 6

A major preoccupation of many evolutionary biologists is to explain why there is such a diversity of plants and animals living on the earth. Throughout the world, and especially in the tropics, there is a bewildering variety of organisms, many of them specialized for a very specific way of life and confined to one particular kind of habitat. Why is it that the competitive struggle between organisms that is such an integral feature of the process of natural selection has not produced a much smaller number of highly successful species with generalist habits?

One reason is that the physical environments to be found on earth are themselves infinitely diverse. This complexity is the result of heterogeneity in both space and time. Not only do conditions vary as a result of differences in latitude, climate and altitude, but they are also constantly changing, through both immediate events such as volcanic eruptions and earthquakes, and long-term changes such as continental drift and the cooling of the sun. The diversity of plants and animals that we see today reflects the ability of living things to adapt to the new opportunities continually provided by the constantly changing physical face of the earth.

David Attenborough's book is an essay on diversity, the abiding impression it creates being of the staggering variety of animal and plant life. Each chapter considers a specific type of habitat, such as the ice-caps, tropical jungles, deserts and the oceans. He acts the scene of a continually changing environment by guiding us through the Kali Kandaki valley of Nepal where a tiny river has cut the deepest valley in the world through the rock strata, revealing that what is now a region of spectacular mountains was once deep beneath the sea. Thence we are taken to the most immediate reminders of this restless state of the earth, volcanoes, where rivers of molten lava and clouds of ash create the unpromising conditions in which a new cycle of living plants and animals will eventually flourish.

Each chapter is essentially a travelogue, taking the reader through the characteristic features of each kind of physical habitat and introducing a sample of the variety of living things that have become adapted during evolution to make its living here. Attenborough emphasizes the extreme contrasts that exist between different parts of the world, for example between the vast forests of Northern latitudes and the jungles of the tropics. Despite the fact that the forests receive very large amounts of water in the form of snow, the main

problem facing plants and animals living there is drought because the water is frozen and inaccessible for much of the year.

Virtually every form of life that is mentioned in this book is currently under threat; the earth is in the throes of a period of mass extinction that will probably make the age which saw the demise of the dinosaurs and many other organisms seem a relatively trivial episode in the story of life on earth. Humans, with their immense capacity for environmental abuse, are the cause of this catastrophe. This issue is relegated, however, to the last chapter, and we are given very little idea of how famous is the continued survival of so many of the plant and creatures which Attenborough describes.

Attenborough's writing tends towards a relentless blandness, perhaps because the original television script was accompanied by such vivid images on film; at many points one wishes that he would describe an animal or a plant in more detail. For example, the reader is given only a hint of the extraordinary feats of endurance and navigational skill displayed by penguins as male and female trek alone for hundreds of kilometres through the Antarctic winter to bring food back to their young. Similarly, there is only the briefest mention of the road-runner's ability to provide water for its young in the aridity of the Arizona desert: of the way that darkling beetles obtain water by allowing dew to condense on their bodies; and of the capacity of mangroves to breathe through roots that grow upwards into the air. Throughout the book, deeper discussion of some of the remarkable ways in which organisms have become adapted to the many and varied challenges posed by their environment is sacrificed to the cause of mentioning as many species as possible.

To the professional biologist, the most curious feature of his writing in his preference for the word "develop" rather than "evolve". This word "develop" rather than "evolve" reveals a conception of the evolutionary process that comes close at times to the heresy of teleology. Animals and plants make their many adaptations because their environment demands that they do so; evolution is seen as an inevitable process in which the vagaries of chance play a very minor role. It is not Attenborough's aim, however, to take his readers through the labyrinth of modern evolutionary theory. What is most prevalent and most valuable in this book, as to all his writing and television work, is his simple enthusiasm for nature and his delight in discovering in each and every plant and animal, however humble and apparently insignificant, new facets of the complexity and diversity of nature.

*Size, Function and Life History* by William A. Calder, III (431pp. Harvard University Press. £26. 0 674 81070 8) is a study of the biology of life size and its influences on locomotion, reproduction, growth and life history in different species. Three appendices offer a system of nomenclature and formulae for interpretation and prediction and provide study problems.

## Space merchant

Desmond King-Hele

ARTHUR C. CLARKE  
Ascent to Orbit: A scientific autobiography  
226pp. Chichester: Wiley. £14.95.  
0 471 87910 X

Prophets of technological progress rarely live to see their bright ideas turn into a reality that affects people all over the world. One prophet of our time who enjoys that distinction in full measure is Arthur C. Clarke. In 1945 he proposed a trio of Earth satellites moving in equatorial orbits at a height of 36,000 kilometres, to provide a world-wide system of radio and television communication. The satellites would go round the Earth once every twenty-four hours and, with their speed matching the Earth's rotation, would appear stationary in the sky when viewed from Earth. Within twenty years, Clarke's vision had become reality; and now we take it as normal that we can instantly see and hear sporting events or sporting propaganda from far-off parts of the world.

But Clarke is more than a prophet: he is one of the most successful authors of our time, with twenty-nine books of fiction and twenty-eight of non-fiction to his credit. *Ascent to Orbit*, lavishly printed and produced, augments the non-fiction list. The book consists largely of fictionalized reports of Clarke's technical papers, and he has written a short introduction to each paper, to fill in the background. Though these sketches briefly outline the story of his scientific life, they scarcely add up to the "scientific autobiography" promised in the subtitle. The papers themselves have stood the test of time remarkably well, and their reprinting is very welcome. Clarke rarely treads a beaten track and is fertile in new ideas that have often proved fruitful.

Clarke was born in 1917 and left school (at Taunton) in 1936 to become a civil servant in the Exchequer and Audit Department in Lon-

don. His first publication was a letter to his favourite journal, *Amazing Stories*, which began, "I don't think years is the best magazine on the market, but in some respects it is better than the others." After that candid début came a long letter in *Astounding Science-Fiction* in 1938, giving the basic equations of rocket flight wrapped in such appealing pleasantries that even a non-technical reader would be gripped: "Werds fail me. Excuse me for a moment while I take another bite out of the table." Clarke was passionate in promoting space flight in the late 1930s and he was an active member of that small group of enthusiasts, the British Interplanetary Society.

The war years saw him in the Air Force, working on radio direction-finding and gaining a valuable knowledge of radio circuits and general communications technology. In 1945 his space and radio interests fused creatively in his paper proposing communications satellites, which was published in *Wireless World*; Clarke's own title, "The Future of World Communications", was changed to "Extra-Terrestrial Relays" by the editor. "I do not recall any reaction, positive or negative, to this article", Clarke tells us - a revelation that may be consoling to the many other authors who have written epoch-making articles ignored by the world. But the US Navy soon took an interest in Clarke's idea and in 1957, with real satellites being launched, the idea became an obvious goal. The first stationary communications satellite was launched in 1963; today more than 100 are in orbit (though not all are still functioning), and they handle most of the world-wide traffic in words, pictures and data.

The next paper, just as perceptive, was an essay on "The Rocket and the Future of Warfare", published by the *Rayn Air Force Quarterly* in 1946. Clarke pointed out that in the nuclear age "a country's armed forces can no longer defend it", and that "upon us, the heirs to all the past and the trustees of a future which our folly can slay before its birth, lies a

responsibility no other age has ever known". The paper won a prize offered by the *Quarterly* and was also instrumental in gaining Clarke a place at King's College, London. He studied mathematics and physics, and graduated with first-class honours in 1948. Then he worked for two years as Assistant Editor of *Physics Abstracts*.

After that, his career is in the public domain: 1950 and 1951 saw the publication of his influential books on *Interplanetary Flight* and *The Exploration of Space*, and also the first of his science-fiction novels. His great success as a space-fiction writer gave him independence, and since the 1960s he has chosen to live in Sri Lanka, rarely travelling, and keeping in touch via those world-wide radio links that he foresaw.

There are fifteen further technical papers in the book, mostly on space flight, astronomy or electronics. Clarke's surveys of the dynamics of space flight are clear and concise, and as always he supports new ideas, such as the "space elevator", a tower from the ground to geostationary orbit which would dispense with the need for rockets - if only we could find structural materials of adequate strength.

Clarke's optimism is refreshing and unshakeable. For example, he believes that instant communication between people in all parts of the world will be a powerful force for world peace, and not a gift to governments for better brain-washing of their deluded subject-peoples.

It is often said that there are no real heroes now, only mirage-images created by the media. Well, Clarke is real: from humble beginnings as a very junior civil servant, his imagination and talent have won him world fame in the two different spheres of space and literature (*The City and the Stars* is literature, *pace* the literary establishment). Clarke has enjoyed the fame but has not been spoilt by it. He remains a bastion of common sense in a mad world, cheerful, enthusiastic, hard-working and ever concerned with the world's welfare.

## In astronomical circles

G. E. R. Lloyd

G. J. TOOMER (Editor)  
Ptolemy's Almagest  
639pp. Duckworth. £55.  
0 7156 1588 2

The received popular wisdom about Ptolemy still often includes the general notion that his theory hung like a dead weight on the subject until release was obtained with the Copernican revolution. This is still normally treated as the prime example of a successful scientific revolution as well as one of clear scientific progress, and if Copernicus was a Good Thing, it may seem to follow that what he was replacing, the Ptolemaic system, was not. Apart from the lack of imagination shown in the rejection of Aristarchus' heliocentric hypothesis, the Ptolemaic system was - it is often thought - intolerably complicated and at points quite arbitrary. Epicycles and eccentrics were piled on one another and not even that was enough to save the phenomena, for Ptolemy found himself forced to adopt a point other than both the centre of the deferent and the earth from which motion round the circumference of the deferent is constant - the notorious doctrine of the equant.

There is much that is wrong in this not unduly exaggerated sketch. First, it might be objected that Ptolemy himself can hardly be blamed if his system was not superseded for 1,300 years or more; the fact that it provided the framework with which first Greeks, then Arabs, then slowly again Europeans, engaged in sometimes quite sustained astronomical inquiry need not simply be put down to their deep-seated conservatism. Second, it was of course not just Ptolemy who rejected heliocentrism; indeed we know of no one in antiquity other than a certain Seleucus who followed Aristarchus. That issue turns out to be one of very great complexity in which not just physical considerations were invoked - the "common-sense" objection that the earth appears to be at rest - but also mathematical or astrological considerations, such as the absence of stellar parallax.

Third, the assessment of the complexity of the Ptolemaic system and of its arbitrariness will depend, no doubt, upon one's viewpoint. But it can be argued that the great strength of the epicycle-eccentric model lay in its flexibility, a flexibility increased by the use of the equant, which can be seen as an imaginative stroke of innovation.

Finally, in the comparison between Ptolemy and Copernicus there is an important sense in which what they share is as great as where they differ. The *De Revolutionibus* is not just directly modelled on the *Almagest* in the style and order of presentation: it uses the same basic geometric models of epicycles and eccentrics; indeed Copernicus's rejection of the equant can be thought of as a return to a purer version of those models. From most points of view there is an essential continuity in astronomical theory from the Greeks down to and including the *De Revolutionibus*. It is only with Brahe that substantial new bodies of data come to be secured, and only with Kepler that the model of circular motion is eventually abandoned.

Myths about Ptolemy's astronomy, where they persist, can certainly not be laid at the door of scholarly neglect. On the contrary, the *Almagest* has been marvellously well served, in recent years, by commentaries of the highest order. In 1974 Olaf Pedersen produced his detailed *Survey of the Almagest* and in the following year appeared the classic three-volume *History of Ancient Mathematical Astronomy* by the supreme master Otto Neugebauer. On the other hand a distinct handicap to study has been the lack of an adequate English translation. Although Manitius's German version (revised by Neugebauer) is very serviceable, Toomer's remark - on the French of Halma - "suffers from excessive literalness" is a fair one, while that on the English translation of R. Catesby Taliaferro, severe though it is, is just: "silence is the kindest comment one can make".

So the appearance of this new version is most welcome and it can be laid straight away to the credit of the editor that the earth appears to be at rest, but also that the translation is in a modern language, clearly written, though not generally

obscure, is often tortuous to a degree and Toomer might have done more than he has to break up the sentences which, in the original, frequently stretch for twenty lines or more. Nor has the temptation to resort to paraphrase always been resisted, or rather not all the paraphrases are accompanied - as promised in the preface - with a literal translation in the notes. Yet on the whole the accuracy and faithfulness to the original, including in the small but important matter of a scrupulous adherence to Ptolemy's own mathematical notations, are exemplary.

The version is modestly described as "translated and annotated", and on many points Toomer sensibly limits himself to referring the reader to Pedersen, to Neugebauer or to both. But in one respect especially this is far more than just a translation. Toomer has undertaken extensive recalculations of the numerical results and tables in the text. One outcome of this has been to help establish correct readings, for while some discrepancies between the accurately computed values and the text can clearly be ascribed to Ptolemy himself, others are just as certainly due to scribal errors. Again, in the detection of these Toomer has made good use of the Arabic tradition as a supplement to the Greek manuscripts. Emendations to Helberg's text are helpfully collected in one of the appendices, and a further welcome feature of the book is the addition, in another, of worked examples to illustrate Ptolemy's computations. Controversy over the assessment of this, assuredly the most influential single work of Greek science, will no doubt continue, with the question of Ptolemy's relationship to his predecessors, the degree to which his observations can be trusted, his manipulation, not to say fudging, of his results, all currently lively debated issues. But we can all be grateful to Toomer for providing us with this fine tool of scholarship.

In *Search of Ancient Astronomies*, a survey edited by E. C. Krupp of various aspects of archaeo-astronomy, has now been released in paperback (281pp. Penguin. £4.95. 0 14 024 810 2) in the series "The World of Man".

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# The stylus-pusher's life

Barry Kemp

T. G. H. JAMES  
Pharaoh's People: Scenes from life in Imperial  
Egypt.  
282pp. Bodley Head. £15.  
0170 102231

The ancient Egyptians excelled at many things, and one of them was public relations. They carved on the walls of their temples exquisite scenes of kings and gods in a world of eternal handshakes. They decorated their tombs with bright pictures of peaceful rural life filled with clean and neatly turned-out, jolly peasants. But was life in ancient Egypt really like this? Was the Nile Valley once the home of a golden age of harmony and social innocence? In our modern cynicism we instinctively say no – the Garden of Eden was always a myth. But not for the scholar the simple answer. He must attempt an evaluation. He must define what the ideals were, and try to judge how far society in practice accommodated itself to them. He cannot accept the simple view either that ancient portrayals of the ideal can be taken at their face value, or that in the past those who could exploit their fellow men always did so, with open nastiness or veiled by hypocrisy. This book is an elegant attempt by a leading Egyptologist at just such an evaluation, an extended essay on the quality of life in ancient Egypt, a topic difficult for any period. The main focus is on the five centuries of the New Kingdom (c 1554 to 1080 ac), the period which gave the Egyptians wealth and an empire, and has bequeathed to us most of the visible antiquities of the Luxor area: the Valley of the Kings and Luxor and Karnak temples amongst them. The period is special in other ways. It is represented by more written documents and is more accessible to modern sensibilities than earlier ones.

Ancient texts and tomb pictures provide T. G. H. James (who is Keeper of Egyptian Antiquities in the British Museum) with his basic raw material, and one of the strengths of his book is the wealth of texts translated, often from sources which are not otherwise readily available outside a specialist library. Almost all come from one particular section of ancient Egyptian society: "scribes", ie bureaucratic officials who cultivated an image of languid superiority. "Be a scribe", ran the motto. "It saves you from hard work, and preserves you from every kind of labour." They were the

ones who served Pharaoh, ran the empire and looked after the temples, gathered the taxes and supervised the craftsmen. One of the grandest, the vizier Rekhmire, decorated his tomb with what amounts to a pictorial encyclopedia of his responsibilities. Elements in the lives of these men (the ancient sources offer little scope for feminist research) provide the principal window that opens into the Egyptian world. Mr James makes the most of what material there is. He has much to tell us of the practical side to being a scribe: how papyrus was made, how letters were written and posted, the kind of texts the budding scribe studied at school, and the responsibilities he was eventually given. A mix of texts and archaeology offers an attractive picture of his ideal residence – a self-sufficient farmstead set within a town. On these topics the author provides a detailed and lucidly written guide full of scholarly asides and personal interventions that rescue his material from dryness. Two chapters offer particularly valuable essays on activities in which scribes would have been frequently involved. One on domestic economy explains how the ancient system of barter worked and how it could be both sensitive on a small scale, and effective at an institutional level, and a long way from its modern primitive image. The other section deals with justice, for which the same scribal class was also responsible. Its ideals of moderation, benevolence and regard for one's fellow men, even if not always sustained in practice, are one of the most acceptable features of ancient Egypt. And, as James points out, whatever shortcomings the judicial process may have had, there is ample evidence that people approached it with the expectation of receiving the justice of the ideals.

It is when James turns to people outside the scribal class that the limitations of the sources become obvious. We are obliged still to view them through the same scribal eyes, the eyes that were taught disdain for all other walks of life. One chapter is devoted to them: the copiers, the carpenters, the jewellers. Here the tomb pictures have left a uniquely detailed record of ancient technology which James exploits. But as to their social conditions we are left to guess. We can catch glimpses of peasant life, and of some of the afflictions of being at the bottom of the social scale. But all too often the huge gaps in our knowledge of social conditions among the general population have to be filled out with appeals to common sense and the universality of human experience. Peasant life was hard not just because scribes said so

one another but because it always is. But whether it was harder than in, say, Roman or Medieval Islamic times, who can tell? There is no objective scale for measuring a hard life. Certainly more remains to be found out. Life-expectancy of different groups and the incidence of disease are two topics where research still has far to go, but not by using texts.

The overwhelming impression of New Kingdom society from the sources we have is one of blindness and self-satisfaction, and the scenes of life are those chosen by settled bureaucrats seemingly remote from political intrigue at court and not given to speculation or critical self-analysis. One is also tempted to add: and leading dull and uneventful lives as well. But on reflection this must also be an illusion. One general feature of large organizations offering opportunities for promotion is personal intrigue played at all levels with varying degrees of dedication. In ancient Egypt only its consequences are apparent: the great vizier Rekhmire himself suffered a vast disgrace but this is visible only from the pattern of disfigurement in his tomb. But the universality of human experience prompts us to wonder what long and involved intrigues surrounded this, what glacial consternation rippled through the minds and conversations of countless contemporary officials whose first reaction would have been to consider the personal consequences and how they might be turned to personal advantage. And when they argued did they do so with hysterical voices and dramatic gestures far removed from the serenity of the pictures which they wanted posterity to see? The sources sometimes bring us close to the minds of the ancients, but only within a narrow band of experiences. The conventions of reserve and politeness have forever blocked off most of what they felt and did, and preserve their ideal images even against the most determined and sensitive of modern prying.

## Purple heart-throb

A. Wallace-Hadrill

BRIAN W. JONES  
The Emperor Titus  
227pp. Croom Helm. £15.95.  
07099 1430 X

Titus is an enigma. His reign scarcely exceeded two years, nor was he responsible in its course for any event of significance. True, he inaugurated that supreme monument of Roman imperialism, the Colosseum, but its construction was largely his father Vespasian's work, and his own main contribution was the orgy of animal slaughter that marked its opening. It was in his reign too that Italy suffered the natural catastrophe of the eruption of Vesuvius. But despite his unpromising record, Titus acquired from the moment of his death a legendary status which is fairly reflected in Mozart's *Clemenza di Tito*. He was known, in language normally reserved for the stars of the amphitheatre or circus, as "the heart-throb of the Roman people". Round him cluster anecdotes of a romantic flavour unusual even for Roman emperors: on the single day he performed no act of bounty, he told his friends the day was wasted; and he disarmed potential assassins by seating them next to himself at the games and passing them the combatants' blades for inspection.

The fact that the surviving sources for the reign preserve only this sort of stuff (Tacitus, which might have been relied upon for 'hard-headedness, la loi') had deterred historians before Brian Jones from attempting a serious biography of Titus. In that sense Jones has filled a gap. He gives a careful and balanced account of the facts of Titus' life from birth to death. He assesses his achievement stage by stage through his career, finding on the whole some slight signs of promise but none of real talent, whether as a commander before his accession in the Jewish war (Jerusalem was easy prey) or as an administrator and policy-maker subsequently. The enigma remains.

Jones is well up in the scholarly bibliography and draws particularly on the ample fruits of

recent research into the careers and connections of individuals, the discipline known in the trade as prosopography. He collects useful information on the links formed by Titus, especially during military service, and on the amici whose service he employed in his reign. But prosopography only bears ripe and digestible fruit when wedded to analysis of social institutions; for these dictate the lines along which connections are formed and acted out. Gelzer and Syme understood this, but lesser prosopographers forget. Jones is not much interested in social institutions. Instances of small observation he makes in passing: he finds it improbable that the elder Pliny shared a tent with Titus in Judaea on the grounds that only men of similar rank would be "tent-mates" (*contubernales*). On the contrary, sharing a tent with a senior officer was one of the key circumstances by which a young man acquired connections for his career, a point of reference to the whole prosopographical argument.

The institution which cries out for analysis in the search for some sort of understanding of Titus is the Imperial court itself. Titus has the privilege of an upbringing at court and his brother Domitian did not; this contrast explains Vespasian's different treatment in the reign of his two sons. Titus already had the right connections, including that with the superannuated but influential beauty Berenice. It is here too that a solution to the enigma of Titus' reputation might be pursued. It is often glibly stated that an emperor's reputation depended on his popularity with the senate. Yet it is not at all easy to see what Titus did to endear himself to the senate, nor quite how Domitian antagonized it. It would be worth experimenting with the hypothesis that the court, informal and socially heterogeneous in its composition and maintaining, despite individual dramas of intrigues and cabals, a surprising continuity from reign to reign, itself was a forum for discussion of the emperor's qualities and provided a lead in opinion-forming among the intelligentsia. Titus knew how to handle his court where Domitian did not. Along such lines, the mythology of Titus might prove more revealing than the reality.

## Judgemental Attitudes

They lived in exquisite misery  
For others' betterment.  
They died  
With *It's not for us to say* upon their lips.

We never thanked them  
To their satisfaction.  
It was their satisfaction  
That we never did.

A rinsed transfiguration of hair-dos  
Into the empyrean,  
They gave each doom-dark cloud  
Its silver lining.

JOHN MOLE

# The Franciscans' new church

Bruce Boucher

A. FOSCARI and M. TAFURI  
L'Armonia e i conflitti: La chiesa di San  
Francesco della Vigna nella Venezia del '500.  
217pp. Turin: Einaudi. L.35,000.  
88 06 03547 X

The building of San Francesco della Vigna in the sixteenth century involved two major architects, Jacopo Sansovino and Andrea Palladio; its patrons and promoters included one doge, Andrea Gritti, several patrician families, and the enigmatic friar, Francesco Zorzi. Although the church's basic history is well known, many questions about San Francesco have so far remained unanswered: what role did Doge Gritti play in its rebuilding; what value should be placed on the memorandum drawn up by Francesco Zorzi in 1535; how decisive were the Grimani family in the church's later history; and, finally, why was Sansovino's project for the façade rejected in favour of Palladio's?

Antonio Foscari and Manfredi Tafuri have attempted to answer these questions in *L'Armonia e i conflitti*. They take their title from the metaphor of divine harmony recurrent in Zorzi's memorandum and other writings as well as a more general concept of political harmony ascribed to the Venetian state; the conflicts are the disputes which beset the building and its patrons. Their attempt to unravel historical fact from supposition has led into a variety of subjects such as the urban policy of Andrea Gritti, the philosophical writings of Francesco Zorzi, and the relationships between the two architects and their patrons. The result is a densely written but highly stimulating book which has redefined an important episode in Renaissance architectural history.

The most illuminating chapters of *L'Armonia e i conflitti* come in the first part of the book which deals with the period 1520-50 and the project for a new church. They reaffirm the importance of both Gritti and Zorzi in the genesis of the building, while modifying some mistaken impressions of both. Attention is given to Gritti's interest in the urban renewal of Venice and his support for the Tuscan architect, Jacopo Sansovino. The authors see Gritti's concern for the new San Francesco as an extension of his preoccupation with the renovation of Piazza San Marco, and they plausibly link the rebuilding of Gritti's private palace next to the Franciscan house with the first attempt to rebuild their own church in the 1520s. These initial stirrings bore fruit in 1533, when permission for the rebuilding came from Rome, and the foundation stone was laid by Gritti himself in 1534. A previously unpublished document also reveals that Gritti and the Signoria of Venice ordered two models for the new church, the one by Gritti's protégé Sansovino eventually being chosen. Gritti intervened again in 1535 when differences emerged between the architect and the friars, and he requested Francesco Zorzi to draw up his memorandum on Sansovino's model. In 1536, Gritti negotiated the right to be buried in the presbytery of the new church in exchange for 1,000 ducats, while concurrently establishing an agreement with the friars over the distance between his family palace and the line of the new church's façade. He should not, however, be taken as the sole mover in the affair, nor was his financial contribution decisive for the building's success. Instead, his role was that of a constitutional monarch, encouraging and exerting pressure behind the scenes.

The pages on Francesco Zorzi are equally informative. New archival information published here shows that Zorzi occupied a central place in the negotiations between the Franciscans and the Venetian state. Many of the friar's political manoeuvres centred on securing sufficient space for the church and at a chapter meeting early in 1537, Zorzi, who was procurator for San Francesco, announced that the government had agreed to underwrite construction of a bridge on the canal, the reinforcement of the canal banks with stone and the paving of the church's courtyard. Zorzi underlined the importance of these concessions by noting that a large and spacious setting was necessary in order to attract a substantial number of communicants. His well-known memorandum of

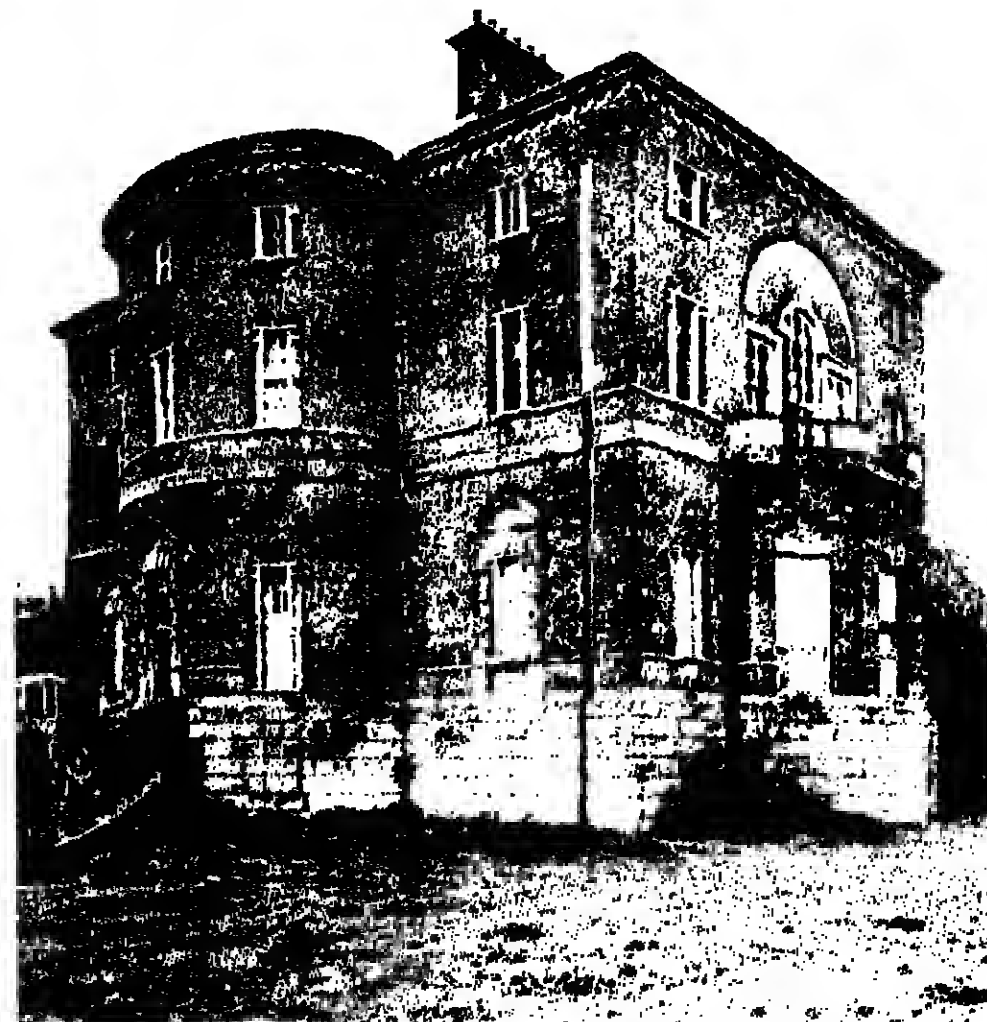
porary architectural theory also. Following an idea first advanced by Deborah Howard Foscari and Tafuri show that the friar's purpose in writing was to give an intellectual reinforcement to Sansovino's project by basing its proportions on a system of harmonic numbers and by making some practical suggestions as well. It may well be, as Foscari and Tafuri suggest, that some of Zorzi's observations were gained from conversations with Sansovino himself.

If Gritti and Zorzi played major roles in establishing the new San Francesco, a number of patrician families also underwrote it through the purchase of chapels. Some, like the Grimani, Giustinian and Barbosio families, were related by marriage and may have acted in concert, but the most dominant among them were the Grimani. Their relationship with San Francesco della Vigna is described in the second part of the book. One of the most powerful houses in Venice, the Grimani paid for the erection of the façade, originally intending it as a monument to several generations of their family. Indeed, it has recently been argued that the church was a personal project of Vettor Grimani, a major patron of Sansovino and an acknowledged expert on architecture in his day. The context of the building's history proves this to be an oversimplification. Vettor Grimani's star was rising in the 1540s and 50s, but his plan to make the church's exterior façade into a monument to his grandfather, Doge Antonio Grimani, ran foul of earlier family plans to commemorate the doge on another church. An attempt to divert money from the other church to San Francesco provoked a legal battle, and nothing was done about the façade of San Francesco until after Vettor Grimani's death in 1558.

The charge of erecting the façade fell to Vettor's surviving brother Giovanni Grimani, patriarch of Aquileia. He appropriated to himself the family chapel in San Francesco, oversaw its decoration, and also gave the commission for the façade to the younger and less well established architect, Andrea Palladio. The reasons for Giovanni's disregard for his brother's wishes and his chosen architect, Sansovino, have never been fully explained, but Foscari and Tafuri convincingly suggest that Giovanni Grimani's choice of Palladio was influenced by Daniele Barbaro, Grimani's chosen successor as patriarch and a distinguished architectural theoretician. Palladio was the favourite of a younger generation of aristocrats who wished to introduce a more impossibly antique style for public and private buildings; the designs of Sansovino and the Neoplatonic theories of Francesco Zorzi were outdated by the 1560s, ready to be discarded in favour of a more systematic, Aristotelian approach to architecture. For whatever personal reasons, Giovanni Grimani was swayed by such arguments, thus advancing Palladio's Venetian career. The façade as designed by Palladio differed from Sansovino's project not only in its approach to architecture but also in the absence of any Grimani monument.

These are only a few of the major themes which emerge from *L'Armonia e i conflitti*. It is a sober, factual account, bolstered by reference to documentation and a wide reading in contemporary sources, though it contains too many theories and unsubstantiated ideas which threaten at times to obscure its solid structure. The story of San Francesco to 1550 is given in much greater detail than its later history while the actual state of the building, its chapels and their patrons are treated only selectively. The authors seem at times less at ease when grappling with the problems of design and style than with more abstract topics. Thus their proposed reconstruction of Sansovino's first model appears to be at variance with its image as recorded on a medal of 1534, and given the range of attributions of minor projects to Sansovino, they seem to have no very clear idea of his personality as an architect. They also show a lack of interest in the more mundane questions of how San Francesco della Vigna was built.

*L'Armonia e i conflitti* could have benefited from a rigorous pruning, a final drawing together of its many threads, and, above all, an index, but the book is one which no student of Renaissance architecture will want to miss, and for future studies of San Francesco della Vigna.



Barlaston Hall, Staffordshire, seen from the south-west; reproduced from the book reviewed below.

## A knight and his villas

Kerry Downes

MARCUS BINNEY  
Sir Robert Taylor: From Rococo to  
Neoclassicism.  
112pp, plus 81 black-and-white plates. Allen  
& Unwin. £10.95 (paperback, £6.95).  
004 720028 6

Turning from sculpture to architecture, Robert Taylor achieved success and a six-figure fortune, a knighthood and a memorial in Westminster Abbey. He also worked as surveyor to London estates and public buildings: the most notable of these was the Bank of England where he preceded Sir John Soane. He named his son Michael Angelo, but he was modernist enough to take artful pupils and to leave most of his money to endow the Taylorian Institute at Oxford for the study of modern languages.

Taylor's drawings and papers have not been seen since his death in 1788. His reputation, high in his lifetime, now rests on what is recorded or preserved of his executed buildings. In general, and without the illumination of personal documents, modern writers have found in his work and life a dullness appropriate to the hinterland between Rococo and Neoclassicism. Marcus Binney, who incorporates these stylistic markers into the title of his welcome monograph without dwelling on their significance, places Taylor in the Second Elvian, Poets' Corner or no; nevertheless he demonstrates his considerable quality and originality.

Several of Taylor's country villas and two larger country houses survive, as well as some of his London residences. The Bank work has virtually disappeared through rebuilding, although we have enough visual records to appreciate its quality. Taylor's houses are remarkable for imaginative interior planning, and the villas also for their exposed situations. He liked three-sided bays, oval rooms and staircases, overhead daylight and coupled columns. His detailing is post-Renaissance rather than specifically Palladian; like that of Sir William Chambers, it offered an alternative to the geometrical filigree of the Adam style and is less severely linear than that of the next generation.

These aspects are all illustrated, though not all discussed, in Binney's book, which is based on almost two decades of familiarity and enthusiasm and on much original research, some of which he has previously presented in articles. Especially fine are the analytical descriptions of the villas – perhaps Taylor's greatest contribution to English architecture and perhaps the buildings of most interest to the author. He has a special commitment to Barlaston Hall which, undocumented but convincingly attributed to Taylor, is owned by Save Britain's Heritage and will one day, it is greatly to be hoped, proclaim with restored eloquence its creator's talents. The author uses a study of patronage links to enlarge Taylor's oeuvre and strengthen attributions, and he shows how much work came to him through personal recommendation.

Binney's decision to produce a short monograph is sensible and laudable; nevertheless, he has left untouched many interesting and serious questions which deserve further consideration, if only because it seems incredible that Taylor should have sprung complete and Minerva-like into London architecture. We know he went to Rome; how much did he see there and what impressed him? Did he visit Genoa and do the corn staircases of some of his villas show a debt to the palaces on the Strada Nuova? Was the atrium at Purbrook really inspired by discoveries at Herculaneum rather than Palladio's ideas of ancient houses?

Writing about the Bank of England in 1930, H. R. Steele looked for Roman influences on Taylor's work; Binney rightly dismisses Steele's charges of plagiarism, but he adopts without question his inadequate proposals for sources. In particular he repeats the derivation of the domed Bank Rotunda from the Panteon without, on the other hand, exploring Steele's hypothesis, based on its materials, that the Rotunda was first intended to be an open circular court. A scholar indeed needs the range of Ulysses and the eyes of Argus, and there are small but avoidable lapses. Inigo Jones's apocryphal views on barns are not only accepted "of course" but inaccurately paraphrased, and the point about the House of Raphael is surely that it is not a Taylor-like building in which Mr Binney would troop his

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An eminently readable account of the rise of political advertising on US television, particularly valuable in being illustrated with scripts matched to stills sequences of some of the key campaigns. *The Guardian*  
£16.95 Hardback. 220pp illus. 0-282-04076-1

## THE MIT PRESS

128, Buckingham Palace Road London SW1W 9SD

The first is the







# Illustrating for beginners

Jane Doonan

Bears, ranging from the hospitable to the phantom, dominate these recent picture books. The one with the biggest bulk and the sharpest claws gives his name to Eric Carle's latest book *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* The text asks this ample animal which pads across the first page-opening, "I see a red bird looking at me", comes the response. The page is turned, and there it is, its wings spanning the next opening. This simple question-and-answer formula repeats itself as a fine yellow duck, a Franz Marc blue horse, a black sheep and more succeed each other, until a smart monkey suggests that a group of children is looking at him. The children are posed that same question, and a memory test brings the book to a close. In his new illustrations for Bill Martin Jr's old text, Eric Carle uses collages of brightly coloured tissue paper. In each animal Carle creates a balance between illusion and reality.

The purple cat, for example, turns its wary head to the viewer and is in the process of lifting itself up to walk away. From its pose, one can tell that it is moving very slowly. The narrowest overlapping of tissue creates a contour line at the conjunction of ears and head, head and body. The overlapping suggests the possibility of movement through the play of spare paper. Doubling the tissue at the haunches gives solidity and form. The edges of the tissue may be sharp, pricking up the cat's ear; it may be boldly torn to simulate thick tail fur, or given the finest serration to suggest the softest fluff. The texture is added by bold free crayoning. All is perfectly judged. The book's natural home is in the primary school, where the rhythms of the text, its colour and its medium will be enjoyed and exploited.

Every cat has its price. When the supermarket staff bring in a huge, hungry cat to deal with *The Supermarket Mice* these intelligent, subversive little creatures save themselves from being the cat's supper by bringing him a shelf-to-mouth service. He repays them by cleaning away the evidence of their joint criminal activities and everyone is happy. The book's layout is excellent, with type and illustration treated as one. Margaret Gordon's text is brief, and her cartoon-style illustrations not only participate in the narrative flow, but genuinely extend the text.

The illustrations are firmly framed in an attempt to contain all the mouse high-jinks which go on within, despite which, ears perk out and tails dangle free. The Mouse-house, behind the supermarket shelves, is crammed with amusing details which invite speculation. But it is difficult to decide what moral values lie inside this book's cover besides paying a tribute to the virtues of mutual co-operation and courage.

*May We Sleep Here Tonight?*, done with an exquisite sense of organization of space, colour and tone, is close to a Japanese equivalent of Beatrix Potter. Three mice, two rabbits and three racoons arrive at an empty house standing in a fog-bound forest. The climax comes when the owner returns. Is he a monster? No—he is a St Julian of a bear, who dispenses stew and cuddles. Perfect bed-time reading, the book has a weight and size ideal for a child to hold. The medium is crayon, stroked on by a sensitive draughtsman. The slight graininess gives a pearly surface texture and the use of colour is carefully judged, the tones restricted. Cover to cover all the elements, including layout and dusky blue typeface, contribute to the serious mood of the text. Humour is provided by the visual tale, which focuses on the personality of the mouse with the red scarf, who is moved into the central role picture by picture.

Wendy Smith steams the reader into her book, *The Great Grizzly*, on a cruise liner endpaper, and the voyage continues in vignettes, free-standing forms, frames, and one dramatic and grand double spread. Smith is a linearist with the ability to draw people simply being people, doing things like leaning on a ship's rail, or climbing stairs. Cheerful colour is floated in, hitting or missing contours, or energetically felt-penned into forms. An act of violence opens this bizarre tale with the shooting of the Great Grizzly by the founder of a shipping line, who turns the animal into a flat-

stand. It closes, in the 1930s, with the sportsman's descendant, ten-year-old Neville Hawkins, solemnly giving the stuffed bear an honourable burial. In between these events lie revenge, exploitation, and forgiveness. This is a picture book for the older child—perhaps for those who enjoy Ross and Ardizonne.

Marina Wismer's story, *The Wobbly Tooth*, is illustrated by Martin Ursell. It is about a small boy's encounter with the fairy who not only exchanges milk teeth for money, but describes for him the fairy stereotype he expects, before becoming the living contradiction of it. It is a bland story, lacking tension, in which at times Jamie and the Fairy talk at rather than to each other. The verbal imagery is at its strongest in the figure of the fairy herself, who "looked like a smile buried in a jumble sale". Similarly, Ursell's visual imagery is at its best with her, creating a suitably exuberant form, in a riot of rag-tag colours festooned with portable treasures. Ursell's style is concerned with the creation of three-dimensional illusion, largely by tone, carving out depth behind the picture plane. It is not well served by the layout, where illustration and typeface share the same page. Furthermore, illustrations on opposing pages jostling at the centre-fold without an air frame are aesthetically displeasing. Figure drawing does not appear to come easily to Ursell; in contrast to the way old stuffed toys are depicted, the images of children are stiff and awkward.

*The Sheep and the Rowan Tree* is a moral tale demonstrating that the grass only appears to be greener elsewhere. Despite living in an idyllic setting, and having a purpose in sheltering a flock of sheep descended from Giotto's, the Rowan Tree is discontented. A migrating bird helps the tree to get life in perspective. The book is beautifully designed, and illustrated in precise formal images. Colour has an inlaid clarity. On each opening, the text starts with an illuminated capital and faces a full-page illustration set in a decorated border. The motifs within the border, which complement each scene, would grace a naturalist's notebook. Settings are exotic: tropical forest, desert or coral island. There is only one weakness. Julia Butcher has anthropomorphized the tree, giving it a face of branches and berries. Not only is this an inadequate device to carry the supposed emotional content, it also creates a jarring note when set against the accurate detailing of the other animal and plant life.

A highly subjective, natural world rustles in *What Shall I Be Tomorrow?* The book has a lean text, narrated in the colloquial tone of a child describing his fantasy life. Today it's "being-a-beetle day" and in the course of it Beetle meets a series of small creatures. This is a tale for a young child in which the illustrations raise questions about how the images may be "read", for there is a high proportion of relatively large forms, and of part forms, and overlapping forms. But the painting has a life of its own, and could well provide immense emotional satisfaction. Colour floods from a vibrant palette. Underpainting creates brilliant depth, and the heavily textured surface, often scored or overscribbled, is dynamic in feeling.

Back to bears, in this case a puzzled one, who asks, "What is that Noise?" He travels through the seasons searching for the origin of the noise only to find that it is his own heartbeat. Competent watercolour and crayon, in earthy hues of amber, ochre and sap green predominate, and echo the warm tone of the text. Less happily, the bear's tint of a pink cheek and matchbox scarf, and often semi-human poses verge on the sentimental.

Eric Carle and Bill Martin Jr's *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* Hamish Hamilton. £4.50. 0 241 11292 3

Margaret Gordon *The Supermarket Mice*. Kestrel Books. £4.95. 0 722 5876 1

Tan Keldai *May We Sleep Here Tonight?* Illustrated by Yasuko Koide. Faber. £5.25. 0 571 113882 7

Wendy Smith *The Great Grizzly*. Deutsch. £4.95. 0 233 97555 1

Marina Wismer: *The Wobbly Tooth*. Illustrated by Martin Ursell. Deutsch. £4.95. 0 233 97634 5

Julia Butcher: *The Sheep and the Rowan Tree*. Methuen. £4.95. 0 416 27710 1

Peggy Blakeley and Helga Aichinger *What Shall I Be Tomorrow?*. Neugebauer Press A. and C. Black. £4.50. 0 907234 51 8

Michele Lemieux *What is that Noise?* Methuen. £4.95. 0 416 49430 1

# Delicious dread

Geoffrey Trease

LEON GARFIELD  
Gull and Gingerbread  
Illustrated by Fritz Wegner  
77pp. Viking/Kestrel £4.95.  
0670800120

Heart-transplants—with a difference—provide the motif for Leon Garfield's new fantasy. Young Princess Charlotte is renowned for the heart of gold with which she dispenses hospitality to strangers and rules her Rhineland principality of Oberweselsberg, a fairytale city of quaint streets and brightly painted shutters looking so exactly as it does on stamps that you "half-expect to see Twenty Pennings engraved on a cloud". Along with its air of enchantment it has up-to-date sanitation, an excellent public transport system, early closing on Thursdays and steamers calling twice a day. The best of both worlds, indeed.

Thither goes, Giorgio, a good-looking but impetuous philosophy student of Padua, who has already absorbed the important lesson that it is better to be rich than poor, and that marriage may be the easiest route to that end. With his sagacious old horse (unnamed, an odd omission in a children's story) he crosses the Alps on one of those quests which are a favourite Garfield device to symbolize the search for truth and permanent values.

Nearing his destination, he has the traditional wayside encounter with a witchlike old woman, whose one desire in life is the princess's golden heart. She asks Giorgio to get it for her. When he shrinks from the ghoulish commission she gives an alarming demonstration of how deftly she can, with her magic scissors, needle and thread, slit open his arm and stitch it up again without trace or tremor. Afraid to refuse, but with no intention of fulfilling her horrific instructions, he accepts the

needlework case pressed upon him, together with the necessary replacement heart of finest china, and resumes his journey.

He is warmly received at the castle, which, like the princess, is all it has been cracked up to be, with its peacocks, Italian fountains and formal French gardens "like an impossible problem in green geometry". Now, as we are all fully expecting with delicious dread, his good resolutions weaken. Temptation lures him on, step by fatal step, not greed but vanity, over-estimating (as which of us does not?) his own capacity for self-restraint. As he stands over the sleeping princess, still intending no action, the demonic scissors uncontrollably take charge (no prizes offered for interpretations) and in a trice the golden heart is laid bare and detached. Dumbfounded, he drops and smashes the china replica and snatches up a bedside apple to fill the space. The princess does not wake. With the witch's needle and Giorgio's stilette achieves invisible mending.

But in fables, as in life, a technically successful operation can be followed by complications. The princess does not reject the substitute heart, but the change is disturbingly reflected in her nature. Only when, after a succession of nocturnal transplants, Giorgio is driven to restore the original heart of gold, the parable worked out to its happy ending. Even then, there are tantalizing ambiguities. "But it didn't matter. They knew the worst and the best of each other: and what remained was the truth of love, which was the middle ground."

This is cool, Mozartian Garfield, with no violent action or gusty garlic-flavoured characterization, but all the usual verbal felicities, quick-witted dialogue, humorous incongruity, new-minted smiles, and his inimitable quicksilver fancy. Fritz Wegner, who has illustrated two of his earlier books, is a happy choice for the rococo embellishment of so elegantly styled a tale.

# Familiar and unfamiliar

Idris Parry

ANTHONY MOCKLER  
King Arthur and his Knights  
Illustrated by Nick Harris  
294pp. Oxford. £8.95.  
0 19 274531 X

GWYN THOMAS and KEVIN CROSSLEY  
HOLLAND  
Tales From the Mabinogion  
Illustrated by Margaret Jones  
88pp. Gollancz. £6.95.  
0 575 03531 5

*The Mabinogion* and the tales of Arthur have common roots in a Celtic past, but how differently the trees have grown. Arthur is an English possession, a sporting ideal among the corpses and cruelty. This new version for Oxford Illustrated Classics is rousing and readable, with lots of bright dialogue for the young. They should find no difficulty in graduating from the conversation of Ratty and Mole to such remarks as "Good grief, Merlin!" and "Sir Gawain, how are things with you?"

Contrasting with his casual modernity we find words like "encorcelled" and "feutre", and remarks like "Let him rest awhile", "What say you, all, fair sirs?" and "Death itself were better than this shameful wise". This is not chronological confusion but an intelligent device to lead the young reader from the familiar to the unfamiliar, from the present to an amazing past filled with heroic adventure. This relationship between far and near is stressed too in the illustrations by Nick Harris, who seems fascinated by perspective, so that the pictures themselves are a succession of events and places. This collection presents a wide span of the known stories, but the quest for the Grail is omitted on the reasonable grounds that this requires a book to itself.

The stories of the *Mabinogion* are somewhere near as well-known as the Arthurian romances. The *Mabinogion* consists of eleven tales taken from a thirteenth-century Welsh manuscript, but of course, much older in oral tradition. Only four are considered true "branches", and these are the four told in the book now-translated from a version prepared by

Gwyn Thomas for Welsh children.

These legends are darker, more mysterious and primitive than the tales of Arthur. It is significant that the Arthurian stories can be and have been retold in many different ways: the facts of the *Mabinogion* are unthinkable except in their unadorned traditional shape, like an outline of hills. The present version simplifies language and contracts events but leaves the essentials unchanged. It is an improvement on earlier translations.

Robert Graves took much of his material for *The White Goddess* from the *Mabinogion*. The characters are princes shaded from old gods, kings who work as craftsmen with their hands and also produce poetry and magic; women who are both human and divine, like Rhiddan on the horse nobody can catch or Arrian creating a fortunate child by virgin birth.

A giant king crosses to Ireland when the water between the two countries was "just the width of two rivers" and lies across the Shannon for his army to march over on his back. Magdalen fashions a living woman from flowers. She must be real: she deceives her husband and plots his death. These stories of birth, death and resurrection are charged with symbolism but can of course be read with enjoyment simply as exciting events in a world where magic is a basic natural force and poetry a respectable occupation. The transformations are spectacular.

The two authors of this faithful re-working of the old legends have produced a version which could come as a revelation to English children, and even English adults. The drawings by Margaret Jones are perfectly matched to the text and properly suggestive of magic. At the beginning of each "branch" or story she has created an illuminated capital which fills the page with colour and anticipates marvels. These pages are a particularly fine contribution to a beautiful book.

This year's Children's Book Week will take place from October 6-13. A series of events and exhibitions will be held throughout the country. Further information can be obtained from Angela Tombs or Dorothy Webb at the National Book League (01-874 4561).

# London sales of books and MSS

Sarah Bradford

Last week being the occasion of the Tenth International Antiquarian Book Fair, the London auction houses all had sales, the most distinguished of which was undoubtedly that held on September 18 by Bloomsbury Book Auctions of fifteenth and sixteenth-century books from the collection of the late W. R. H. Jewdine.

Jewdine (1920-84) was a man of taste and scholarship, a former editor of *Apollo*, who came to book-collecting through his interest in Old Master prints and drawings. His maxim, according to a bibliophile friend, was "buy with the eye and ask questions afterwards" and he was, like St John Hornby, in the great English tradition of book-collectors, a connoisseur who considered typography, illustration and binding as "mutually dependent in contributing to a single object". His collection was the basis for his scholarly work, *Art and Style in Printed Books*, of which the first volume was privately printed in 1979 and featured many of the books in this, the first part of the sale of his library.

The sale aroused great interest and prices consequently were high. An American collector paid £16,500 for the most expensive lot, a copy of Aesop, *Apologi sive mythologi cum quibusdam carminibus et fabularum additionibus Sebastiani Brant*, two parts in one volume, folio, Basel, by Jacob Wolff of Pforzheim, 1501. Good early woodcuts are in short supply and, moreover, this book provided a rare and important illustration of the development of the German art of the woodcut since the first part contained 194 woodcuts, mostly copies in reverse after the Ulm edition of 1476, while the second part featured 141 woodcuts executed for this work by a Strassburg artist in 1501.

Quatich paid £5,500, considerably over the estimate, for the other Aesop in the collection, *Vita & Fabulae* (after other works), the small folio with text in Greek and Latin printed in Venice by Aldus in 1505. This is the best early text in Greek but the price appears to have been based upon informed speculation that the late-eighteenth-century russia binding was by Roger Payne, the pre-eminent English binder to the genre of the period who worked for, among others, Sir Richard Colt Hoare of Stourhead, this copy, with the Colt Hoare bookplate, having been lot 164 in the Stourhead sale of 1883. The same dealer also purchased for £6,820 one of the most desirable and visually attractive books in the sale, Jost Amman's *Im Fruenzimmer*, . . . printed in Frankfurt by S. Feyerabend in 1586 (but here catalogued as 1592), the first edition in German, with 122 woodcuts of women's costume.

High prices were paid for two desirable bindings. A copy of *Orlando Furioso*, part in one volume, Venice, Vincenzo Valgati, 1588, with the bookplate of the celebrated New York collector Robert Hoe, had an unusual contemporary Venetian binding in chestnut morocco with "yapp" edges (ie, flaps on all three sides), a style used by the Arabs, while the central medallion was essentially Islamic in derivation. It was bought by the Paris dealer, Barbe, for £13,200 with Quatich as underbidder. The same buyer paid the same price, this time with Breslau as underbidder, against an estimate of £800-£1,200 for Fulvio's *Illustrum Imagines*, Rome, Mazzocchi, 1517, this copy, described as a "jewel-box of a book", was in a red morocco gilt binding which is probably South German and not, as catalogued, Italian.

Jewdine himself valued highly. Panormita's *Lectura aurea . . . super quatuor libros decretalium*, Strasbourg, J. Schott, 1510, in a Canon binding with, as if that were not enough, as the front pastedown a leaf from John Lydgate's *Pilgrimage of the soul* printed by Canon in 1483. This was the best preserved of the four Canon bindings hitherto remaining in private hands and the book is important also for the beautiful chiaroscuro border in green and ochre on the title page, by the great engraver Hans Baldung Grien. It went to Quatich for £14,850.

The Jewdine sale was, from the antiquarian book collector's point of view, the outstanding sale of the week. Sotheby's vast offering on September 20 and 21 consisted mainly of

travel, natural history and atlases, included some early and Continental books. A volume containing five of the eight known works by Charles V's personal physician, Joannes Jacobus Adria (c 1485-1560), printed in Palermo by Joannes and Antoninus Pesto and by Antonio de Mayda between 1515 and 1529 and illustrated with contemporary woodcuts, sold for £11,000 to "James". There was also a two-volume copy of *Don Quixote*, the first volume being the second Madrid (ie, third) edition and the second being the first edition, both apparently having once formed part of the Fugger Library, since the first volume bears a faded inscription "Ex Libris Johannis Fugger" and the second volume the library stamp of Oettingen-Wallerstein, whither the Fugger Library passed in the seventeenth century. It was acquired by Quatich for £42,900.

Christie's sale on September 19 provided a

melange of various printed books, autograph letters and manuscripts. Several collections of letters were offered, mainly of personal rather than academic interest, the exception being the Schopenhauer-Lindner correspondence, nineteen autograph letters written by Schopenhauer between 1852 and 1859 to Otto Lindner, a Berlin journalist, the disciple whom the philosopher nicknamed "Doctor Indefatigabilis", with fifteen letters from Lindner to Schopenhauer. The correspondence, although published, made a high price, £45,360 to an anonymous European collector.

Burne-Jones's seventy-five letters to his adored only daughter Margaret, written between 1873 and 1898, were, naturally, highly personal, embellished with pen and ink sketches and some references to his paintings and illustrious friends like Henry James; they sold for £11,880 to Hartnoll.

# AMONG THIS WEEK'S CONTRIBUTORS

Jeremy Adler is a lecturer in German at Westfield College, London.

Mark Amory is the editor of *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, 1980.

Bruce Boucher is a lecturer in History of Art at University College London.

Malcolm Boyd's *Bach* was published last year.

Anthony Burgess's novels include *Earthly Powers*, 1982.

Wanda M. Corn's *Great Wood: The regionalist vision* was published last year.

Masolino D'Amico is Professor of English at the University of Rome.

Tim Dooley's collection of poems, *The Interrupted Dream*, will be published next year.

Kerry Downes's recent books include *The Architecture of Wren*, 1982.

D. J. Enright's collection of essays, *A Mania for Sentences*, was published last year.

Timothy Garton Ash's *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity 1980-82* was published last year.

Peter Halasz is co-editor, with Michael Caesar, of *Writers and Society in Contemporary Italy*, 1984.

Tim Halliday is a senior lecturer in Biology at the Open University.

Ian Hamilton's biography of Robert Lowell was published last year.

Boyd Hilton is a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge.

Aetha Hume is the author of *Edmund Spenser: Protestant poet*, 1984.

Michael Ignatieff's *The Needs of Strangers* will be published next month.

Arthur Jacobs's most recent book is *Arthur Sullivan: A Victorian musician*, 1984.

Barry Kemp is a lecturer in Egyptology at the University of Cambridge.

Desmond King-Hele is the author of *Observing Earth Smellies*, 1983.

Catherine Le Farge is a lecturer in English at Queen's University, Belfast.

G. E. L. Lloyd's books include *Science, Folklore and Ideology*, 1983.

David Macdonald is the editor of *The Encyclopedia of Manuals: Volume 1*, 1984.

Adam Mars-Jones's collection of stories, *Lauter Lecture*, was published in 1981.

Mary Midgley is co-author, with Judith Hughes, of *Women's Choices: Philosophical problems facing feminism*, 1983.

John Naeff is senior lecturer in Art History at the University of Essex.

S. S. Prover's books include *Heine's Jewish Comedy: A study of his portraits of Jews and Judaism*, 1983.

Christopher Prendergast is a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge.

Craig Raine's most recent collection of poems, *Rich*, was published earlier this month.

Stella Rowetham's books include the collection of essays, *Dreams and Dilemmas*, 1984.

Amnon Sella is a lecturer in Political Science at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

George Steiner's *Antigones* was published earlier this year.

George Steiner is the editor of *Index on Censorship*.

A. K. Thorby edited *The Penguin Companion to Literature: Europe*, 1971.

J. A. Turner is the author of *Lloyd George's Secretariat*, 1980.

Edward Ullendorff is Professor Emeritus of Semitic Languages at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

A. Wallace-Hadrill is a lecturer in Ancient History at the University of Leicester.

Ruggero Weber is Professor of Modern European History at the University of California, Los Angeles.

John Weightman is the author of *The Concept of the Avant-Garde: Explorations in Modernism*, 1972.

David Welsh's books include *South Africa's Options*, 1979.

Geoffrey Wheatcroft is completing a book on the "Randlords", the South African mining magnates.

Ermond Wright is Emeritus Professor of American History at the University of London.

# Overseas

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